

Cooking

Special Issue

holiday Baking

BONUS
quick
appetizers

how to make the
best chocolate
desserts

gift ideas: easy
cakes & cookies

great pies to
make & freeze

shortbread,
scones, rolls...



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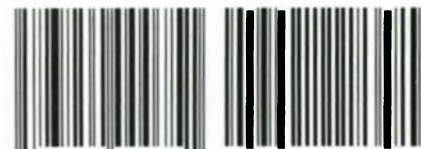
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^{fine}Cooking holiday Baking

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SPECIAL FOLDOUTS

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- ❖ handling
- ❖ chopping
- ❖ melting
- ❖ decorating
- ❖ choosing the type
- ❖ choosing a brand
- ❖ plus six more delicious recipes



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18e

KEY

- ◆ Quick (under an hour)
- ◆ Make ahead
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18e

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NICOLE REES ("Four Easy Cakes," p. 42) was developing recipes for cakes by the age of nine, admittedly with mixed results, and her hobby eventually became a career. She co-wrote the revised edition of *Understanding Baking*, a book on the science and technique of baking, as well as its companion recipe book, *The Baker's Manual*.

KAREN BARKER ("Rustic Tarts," p. 48) is the 2003 winner of the James Beard outstanding pastry chef award. Her updated versions of down-home dessert favorites can be sampled at Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina. Karen co-wrote her first book, *Not Afraid of Flavor*, with her husband Ben. Her next book, *Sweet Stuff: Karen Barker's American Desserts*, will be out this spring.

ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE ("Trading Cookies," p. 50, and "Dinner Rolls," p. 70) is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking* and was *Fine Cooking's* test kitchen director for seven years. Abby's cookbooks include *Great Fruit Desserts*, and Williams-Sonoma's *Dessert*. She wrote the New England and mid-Atlantic portions of *Savoring America*, and is at work on her next book, *The Weekend Baker*.

When **KATHLEEN STEWART** ("Make-Ahead Pies," p. 56) isn't baking her famously delicious pastries at the Downtown Bakery & Creamery in Healdsburg, California, chances are she's sharing her secrets with *Fine Cooking* readers. She's also a contributor to *The Baker's Dozen Cookbook*. Before opening her own shop in 1987, Kathleen worked for twelve years at Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California.

REGAN DALEY ("Scones," p. 62) is the author of *In the Sweet*

Kitchen, a baking book with an ingredient- and flavor-driven approach that won the IACP cookbook of the year award in 2001. Regan has worked both the pastry and savory sides of some of Toronto's best restaurants, including Avalon.

CAROLYN WEIL ("Shortbread," p. 66) was the first pastry chef at San Francisco's acclaimed Stars restaurant and the owner of The Bakeshop, a much-loved bakery in Berkeley, California. She now strives to make baking approachable to home cooks through teaching and writing. Carolyn is a contributor to *The Baker's Dozen Cookbook* and the author of Williams-Sonoma's *Pie & Tart*, published last spring.

EMILY LUCHETTI ("Chocolate Roulade," p. 74) is the executive pastry chef at Farallon in San Francisco. The author of *Stars Desserts* and *Four Star Desserts*, Emily also wrote the dessert chapters of the *Farallon Cookbook*. Emily received two James Beard best pastry chef nominations and was named pastry chef of the year in 1998 by *San Francisco* magazine. Her newest book, *A Passion for Desserts*, is just off the presses.

SCOTT PHILLIPS has been taking gorgeous photos for *Fine Cooking* for many years, but this second annual issue of *Holiday Baking* is a special tribute to his talents, as he took all of the 144 beautiful food and equipment photos in this issue. Scott graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology with a BFA in Professional Photographic Illustration, and although he's the photography manager for all of The Taunton Press, we like to count him as one of our own *Fine Cooking* team members.

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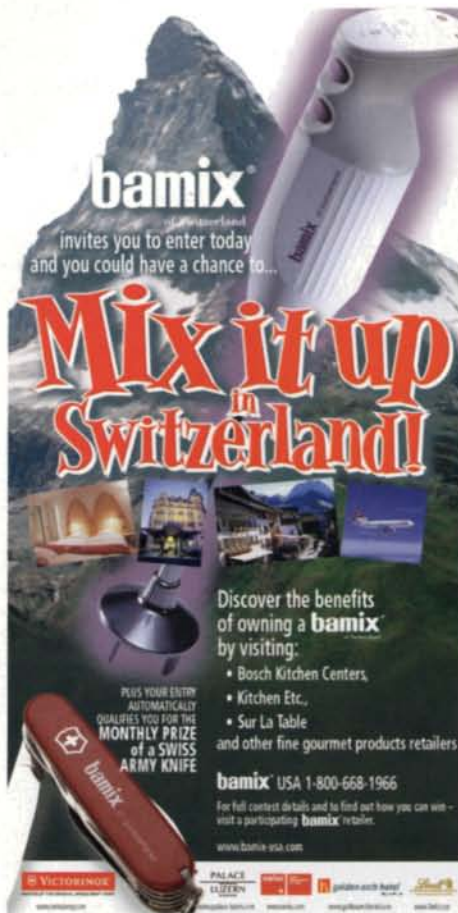


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from the editor

The Chocolate Chronicles

I keep a secret stash of chocolate in my desk drawer. I can't help it. After months of testing all the chocolate desserts in this second annual *Holiday Baking* issue, I got hooked on a daily nibble of a little chocolate something. I'm not the only one on the *Fine Cooking* staff either; in fact, most of us have become chocolate experts after working on the recipes and photos in this issue. We can tell you the best way to melt chocolate (the stovetop is easier than a microwave), the best place to store it (in a cupboard, not the freezer), the best way to drizzle chocolate (with a zip-top bag), and what flavors go best with chocolate (thumbs up to raspberry, mint, espresso, and cinnamon).

You can read about all this and more in our special foldout "Baking with Chocolate" (be sure to

make Alice Medrich's Fastest Fudge Cake) and in special features like the impressive Chocolate Roulade on p. 74. We're especially excited about all the recipes in this issue (chocolate and otherwise) that are perfect for gift giving, like the easy bundt cakes on p. 42 (that Chocolate Stout Cake is amazing) and the dessert sauces on p. 26.

If you're looking for cookies, head straight for "Trading Cookies" (p. 50), our delicious selection of readers' favorites. Some cooks can be coy about sharing recipes, but not our readers! When we put out a call for cookie favorites, you didn't hold back. And while it was hard for us to pick the best, we're sure you'll agree that all of the cookies we've selected, from Denise Pierce's Brownie Cream Cheese Bites to Camilla

Each of the winners from our cookie exchange (p. 50) will receive a collection of baking gear: a Nordic Ware bundt pan; a Leifheit Soehnle electronic kitchen scale; an All-Clad baking sheet; a Casafina rectangular baker; a Frieling measuring cup; Emile Henry individual pie dishes; a Demarle Silpat baking liner; Duncan oven mitts and trivet; and a Doughmakers pie pan.



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Leonard's Macadamia Lace Cookies, are winners. And so are the readers who submitted them; they'll each get the exciting collection of baking gear (courtesy of our advertisers) pictured at far left.

If you need one more gift idea, I've included one of my own family favorites here as my contribution to the holiday exchange. It's a delicious toffee candy, and—you guessed it—it's topped with chocolate.

—Susie Middleton, editor

Toffee-Chocolate Candy

Yields about 35 2-inch pieces.

Variations on this addictive candy show up in older American cookbooks. I got the basic recipe from my mother, Pauletta Evans, who got it from her good friend Carol Coffin, who used to bring us a tin of it every Christmas. Carol finally had to turn over the recipe, as her gift inevitably disappeared overnight at our house. I've adapted the recipe a bit, adding vanilla, bittersweet chocolate, and toasted pecans. You can use all semisweet or even milk chocolate if you like.

6 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped
6 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped
8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter
1 cup granulated sugar
¼ cup water
1 teaspoon light corn syrup
½ teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ cup finely chopped toasted pecans

Combine the two chocolates and set aside. Set a small bowl of water and a pastry brush next to the stove. In a heavy saucepan fitted with a candy thermometer, cook the butter, sugar, water, corn syrup, and salt over medium heat. Stir frequently with a wooden spoon until the butter melts and the sugar dissolves; then stir gently and only occasionally as the mixture approaches 300°F and begins to darken. Brush the sides of the pan down with a little water every once in a while to keep the sugar from crystallizing. When the mixture reaches 300°F (this will take about 18 to 20 minutes), remove the pan from the heat, carefully add the vanilla, and stir it in. With a heatproof rubber spatula, scrape the mixture into a metal 9x11-inch baking pan set on a rack. Tilt the pan until the toffee covers the bottom of the pan evenly. Let cool for 2 minutes. Sprinkle with the chopped chocolate and let it melt for a few minutes (cover with another baking pan to help it melt). Smooth the chocolate with a spatula (use a narrow offset spatula if you have one) and sprinkle on the pecans. Let cool completely (3 to 4 hours) and then break or chop into pieces; use a metal spatula or a blunt knife to pry the toffee out of the pan. To help the chocolate set faster on a warm day, refrigerate the candy. ♦

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A Spice Trio

Cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves

BY ROBERT WEMISCHNER

Separately or together, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves work magic in baking and desserts, heightening flavors and aromas. What would apple pie be without cinnamon? Rice pudding would taste flat without its pinch of nutmeg, and pumpkin pie just couldn't thrill without clove's special zing. Used alone, each of these spices announces its presence in a dish. When used together, the personality of each is subdued, but in turn, the combination is greater than the sum of its parts.

Whole or ground, spices need to be fresh, and ideally, top quality. Buy from mail-order specialists or from vendors who are more apt to sell their merchandise quickly (see Where to Buy It, p. 88). To keep spices fresh, see the sidebar at far right.



Cinnamon

is the best known member of the trio. But are you using true cinnamon or its more common relative, cassia? Only your spice merchant knows for sure; often both are labeled and sold as cinnamon.

Where it comes from: Made from rolled, pressed, and dried tree bark, both cinnamon and cassia have a pleasing, woody fragrance and sweet flavor in both stick and ground form. The widely available brands tend to be made from cassia (*Cinnamomum cassia*). For cassia, look for names such as Korintje (from Indonesia) or Saigon cinnamon (from Vietnam), varieties that tend to possess the fullest and finest flavor. The best true cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zelanicum*) comes from Ceylon and India.

How to use it: Use whole cinnamon sticks for infusing subtle flavor into custard sauce (see the recipe at left), hot cider, and poaching syrups. Add ground cinnamon to pear and apple tarts, to applesauce, and to streusel topping for coffee cake.



Cinnamon Custard Sauce

Yields about 1½ cups.

Here, a classic custard sauce gets a new twist when infused with cinnamon sticks. Try it with poached or baked pears, apples, peaches, or nectarines.

2 cups whole milk
½ cup granulated sugar
3 whole cinnamon sticks,
each about 4 inches long
Pinch table salt
4 large egg yolks

In a small saucepan, combine the milk, ¼ cup of the sugar, and the cinnamon sticks. Set over medium-low heat and stir occasionally until almost boiling. Remove from the heat and let stand for 20 minutes. Discard the cinnamon sticks.

Meanwhile, fill a medium saucepan with about 1 inch of water and heat until barely simmering. Wrap a damp towel around the base of a medium stainless-steel bowl to steady it. In the bowl, combine the

egg yolks and the remaining ¼ cup sugar. Whisk until thick and pale yellow, about 2 minutes. Whisking constantly, add the warm milk mixture to the yolks in a slow, steady stream. Set the bowl in the saucepan so it's over but not touching the simmering water. Put the pot of water over medium heat and stir constantly with a wooden spoon until the mixture thickens slightly and an instant-read thermometer registers 175° to 180°F, 8 to 10 minutes. Check occasionally to be sure the water isn't boiling hard, and don't let the temperature of the sauce exceed 180°F or it may curdle. Strain the sauce through a medium sieve into a clean bowl and then set the bowl over an ice-water bath to cool, stirring occasionally. When cool, cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Nutmeg

possesses warm, almost peppery notes; a little goes a long way.

Where it comes from: Nutmeg comes from the nutmeg tree, which grows in tropical climates and actually yields two spices. The crinkled, hard nutmeg nut itself is encased in a lacy scarlet membrane which, when dried and ground, becomes mace.

How to use: Use whole nutmeg freshly grated; unlike cinnamon, this spice won't do much if used whole. Grate a little into puddings, custards, and sauces. Add it along with other baking spices to apple crisps, pumpkin pies, spice cakes, cobbler toppings, or the spiced butter below. Nutmeg crosses over successfully to the savory arena, too, lifting spinach and cheese dishes, béchamel sauces, Greek lamb casseroles, Italian vegetable stews, and



Scandinavian-style mashed potatoes to delicious heights.

Although you can buy nutmeg already ground, I recommend buying whole nuts: Highly volatile oils make nutmeg taste best when you grate it freshly into a dish. A Microplane grater, one of my favorite tools, makes fast work of grating nutmeg. You can also buy a nutmeg grater for this task (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88).

Keeping spices fresh

When fresh, each spice should pack an aroma that beckons you to use it when you poke your nose into the jar or tin. If your cabinet is full of boxes and tins whose labels are faded and sell-by dates long past, it's time to do some cleaning. Most manufacturers and merchants agree that whole and ground spices have a two-year shelf life once opened, if stored away from heat (under 68°F is best), humidity (no higher than 60%), light, and strong odors. It's a good idea to write the date of purchase right on the bag or tin.



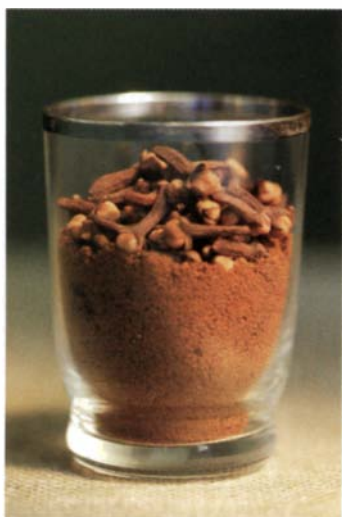
Spiced Butter

Yields about 24 teaspoons.

A pat of this versatile make-ahead butter is great on morning toast, buttermilk pancakes, French toast, oatmeal, waffles, and scones. Or try using it to top off hot cider, hot buttered rum, or mulled wine. Even steaming cups of tea spiked with bourbon become mellow with a pat of this delicious butter.

4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature
¼ cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
⅛ teaspoon ground cloves

With a wooden spoon, cream the butter until smooth. Sift the confectioners' sugar over the butter and add the spices; mix just until blended. Transfer to a square of plastic wrap. Using the plastic to help shape the butter, wrap and mold the mixture into a log about 1 inch in diameter. Chill until firm, at least 30 minutes. Slice as needed into ¼-inch rounds.



Cloves

are the sharpest-flavored member of this fragrant trio, packing spicy depth and piquancy.

Where it comes from: Born of an evergreen tree, cloves are indigenous to Indonesia but are also cultivated in Malaysia, India, and Madagascar. The higher the quality, the more likely this nail-shaped spice will have its bud-like head intact.

How to use: Look to whole cloves for flavoring fruit-poaching syrups. Use ground cloves in concert with other spices in pumpkin pies, spice cookies, and coffee cakes, or put them front and center in the Clove Snaps at right. You can also find clove oil, a fine translation of this spice's warm flavor, a few drops of which are perfect in icings, buttercreams, mousses, and other dishes where the whole or ground spice wouldn't integrate as well.



Clove Snaps

Yields about 3 dozen cookies.

Like gingersnaps, these cookies have a delicious spicy crunch. They're just the thing for a cup of tea.

6¾ ounces (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
1½ teaspoons ground cloves
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
⅛ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature
¾ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 teaspoon packed finely grated orange zest

In a bowl, sift together the flour, cloves, cinnamon, pepper, and salt. In an electric mixer, cream the butter (use the paddle attachment) at medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add the sugar and blend just until combined, scraping the bowl well. Add the egg and orange zest and mix until well blended, scraping the bowl as needed. Add

the sifted dry ingredients all at once and mix on low speed just until the flour is absorbed and the dough starts to come together, about 30 seconds. Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead just until the dough forms a smooth mass. Flatten into a disk that's about ½ inch thick. Wrap tightly in plastic and refrigerate until firm, about 2 hours.

Heat the oven to 375°F. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough ⅛ inch thick, making sure that it isn't sticking to the surface and that it rolls out evenly, lightly sprinkling flour under the dough if needed. With a 2-inch round (or similar-size) cookie cutter, stamp out shapes. Reroll the scraps and stamp out more. Set the cookies ½ inch apart on parchment-lined baking sheets. Bake until the cookies are golden around the edges and on the bottoms, about 12 minutes, rotating the baking sheets as needed for even baking. Let the cookies cool completely on the baking sheets on racks. Store in airtight containers.

*Robert Wemischner is a baking instructor and food writer. He's the author of *Cooking with Tea*. ♦*

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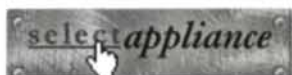
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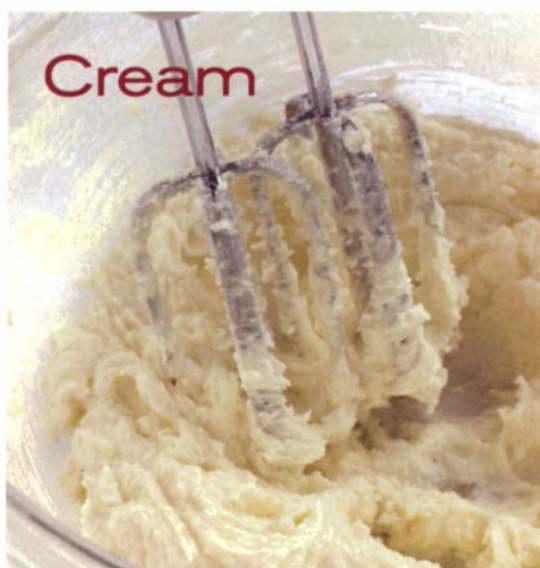
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Mixing Matters

When to cream, cut in, whisk, fold, or stir

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

When you first start baking, it might feel as if you're learning a new language, and in some ways, you really are. You might wonder why recipes have so many mixing terms—cream, cut in, whisk, fold, stir, beat—and whether it really matters which one you choose. It does. The technique and tool you use can dramatically affect how a dish turns out. Let's explore what these mixing terms really mean.



Cream butter to aerate cakes

Often the first instruction in cake and cookie recipes is "Cream the butter and sugar until the mixture is light and fluffy."

The purpose of creaming is to beat tiny air bubbles into the butter. A cake that isn't properly aerated by creaming will be compact and dense instead of light and airy. As you cream butter, or butter and sugar (the best tool is a paddle attachment or

flat beaters), the mixture turns fluffier and paler, a direct result of beating air into it.

The crucial question is: What's the ideal temperature for creaming butter? The answer depends on whom you ask.

Butter holds these air bubbles best at 68°F or just slightly cooler. According to Bruce Healy, a baker who has conducted extensive experiments on this topic, the butterfat in solid butter starts to melt at 68°F. (You can't see the melting because the butterfat is in an emulsion with milk solids.)

But most cookbooks and pastry chefs call for "room-temperature" butter, a term that's not only imprecise since room temperatures vary immensely, but also, if taken literally, that's incorrect. In most households, butter that's truly at room temperature is already a few degrees above 68°F, too warm to cream properly. A better (though less concise) instruction would be to use butter "that's been left at room temperature just long enough to be pliable yet still firm, not soft and squishy." Some cooks call this softened butter. With softened butter (it should be about 65°F, which is below room temperature), you can only cream for about three minutes before it gets too warm, the butterfat starts to melt, and some of those precious bubbles collapse. But



three minutes should be sufficient to get reasonable aeration.

I get superior creaming when I start with refrigerator-cold butter cut into tablespoon-size pieces. During the first minute of creaming, the butter is still too cold to blend with the sugar. But after six or seven minutes, it's magnificent—light, very fluffy, and dry.

Cut in butter to tenderize pastry

The term "cut in" refers to mixing butter or another solid fat with flour. The purpose of this critical step is to grease the flour with the fat and to prevent the formation of gluten, which would make the pastry tough. Gluten forms when flour proteins meet water; as long as you've moisture-proofed the flour by coating it with fat, these gluten-forming proteins can't link up and toughen your dough.

Starting with cold butter is key. This way, you'll end up with many small and large pieces mixed with the flour rather than

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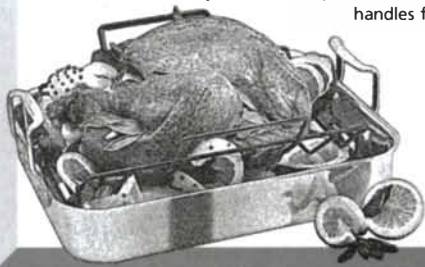
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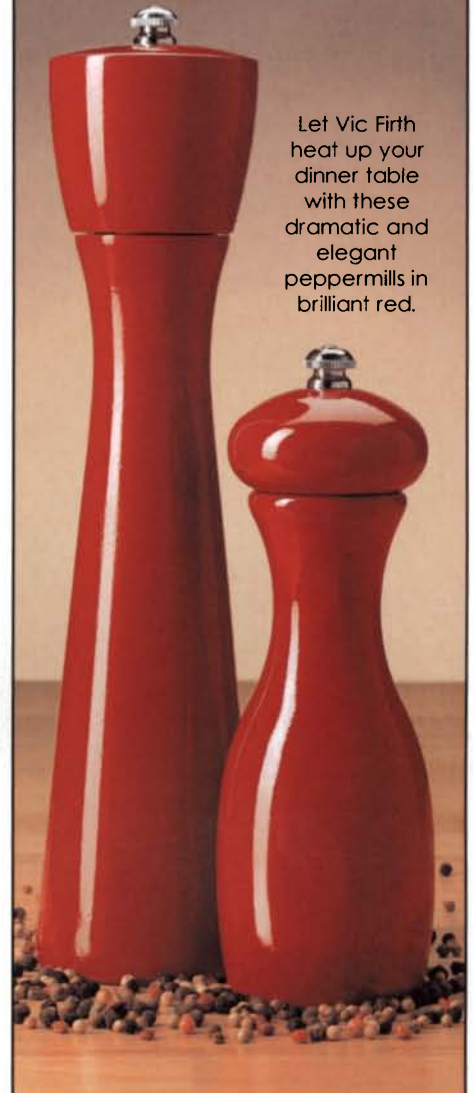
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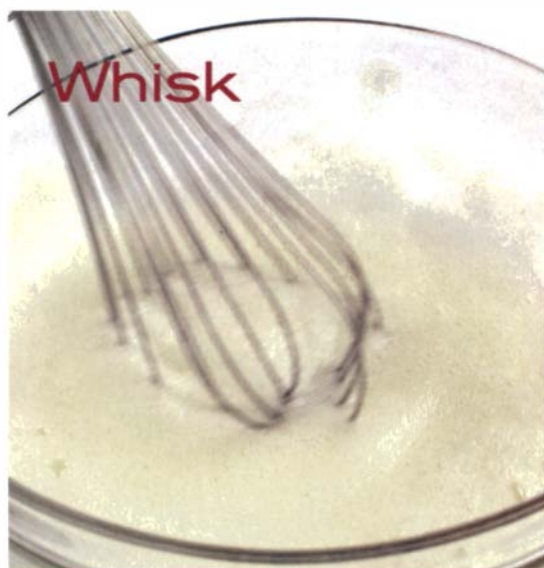
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a completely homogeneous mixture; these varied-size butter pieces help to ensure flakiness once the dough is baked.

Many tools will do the job of cutting in butter—two table knives, a multi-bladed pastry cutter, or your fingertips—but those that do it quickly and without warming the butter are best.

Whisk to incorporate air

A whisk is such a useful mixing tool because its wire tines multiply a single stir in the mixing bowl many times. As a result, a whisk is faster and more efficient at blending ingredients and incorporating air. For jobs like beating egg whites or whipping cream—incorporating lots of air—a balloon whisk (a large whisk with tines that flare into a balloon shape) is ideal. The cream or egg whites stretch between the tines as you whisk, trapping air more effectively.

When it's important to blend ingredients quickly and thoroughly, as when emulsifying a sauce or a mayonnaise, a long, thin whisk is often the best tool. It blends as if you were stirring with a dozen thin spoons.

Fold to preserve volume

Folding is the technique used for combining two mixtures with different textures. It's often called for when mixing a light, aerated mixture (such as whipped cream or whipped egg whites) with a heavier one. To make a soufflé, the goal is to fold beaten egg whites into a heavy soufflé base without deflating the whites. To make a fruit fool, you fold whipped cream into a puréed fruit mixture. In some cakes, nuts must get folded into the batter.

The challenge with folding is to get a uniform texture without losing volume. Gentle lifting is crucial, as is the right tool. A wide, flat utensil with a large surface, such as a rubber spatula

or a dough scraper, works well because you can lift up a large amount of the mixture and spread it across the top. By doing this repeatedly, turning the bowl and gently lifting up more batter, the mixtures combine without rough stirring, which would deflate your lighter ingredients.

More folding tips: It helps to first "lighten" the heavier mixture by whisking in about a quarter of the lighter one; now that there isn't such an extreme difference in texture, the two mixtures will combine more easily. Also, it's better to put the lighter mixture on top of the heavier one, not vice versa. Otherwise, the heavy base would deflate the lighter one. When this isn't feasible, such as when combining ground nuts or flour with whipped egg whites, sprinkle the powdered mixture over the whites gradually to minimize deflation.

Stir to simply blend

Stirring is probably the simplest of all mixing methods. It usually implies using a spoon, a spatula, or another utensil to mix ingredients together, without vigorous motion, until uniformly blended. With stirring, you're not beating in air, greasing flour proteins, or preserving volume. Beating is similar to stirring but suggests an electric mixer and more active movement.

Unless a recipe instructs otherwise, stirring shouldn't be lengthy—in some cases, too much stirring can be detrimental. For example, pancake batter needs gentle stirring to just barely combine the ingredients. Overstirring can make the pancakes tough. When adding fruit, nuts, or chocolate to a batter, you only need to stir until the ingredients are evenly distributed.

Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of CookWise. ♦

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Hand Mixers

Don't confuse bells and whistles with good quality

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

Hand mixers have evolved from offering three basic speeds—low, medium, and high—to sporting as many as ten speeds, along with “slow-start” features, “power bursts” for when the going gets tough, digital displays, and time keepers. Yet after having put twelve widely available mixers to the test, we found the best are those mixers that can do the job powerfully, extras aside.

Maryellen Driscoll is Fine Cooking's editor at large.

Our testing criteria

We tested twelve hand mixers for ease of use, comfort, balance in the hand, weight, and efficiency in performing tasks. The tests included mixing a stiff cookie dough, whipping cream, and beating egg whites to soft and firm peaks. Of the hand mixers we tested, the four pictured here and on p. 24 performed the best.



Top pick

KitchenAid 7-Speed Ultra Power Plus Mixer

\$79.99

www.kitchenaid.com

800-541-6390

This mixer was the most powerful of all those tested, with a good range of speeds. Extremely compact and weighing just 2 pounds, it feels well balanced, doesn't shudder when operating, and has an easy-to-read digital display. Its touchpad speed control is remarkably nimble.

PERKS: This machine's highest speed is just right—not overkill—so that egg whites and cream whip gradually, minimizing the chance of overbeating. The wire beaters have no center post, making cleanup easy and decreasing the chance of dough clogs. The cord has a stiff rubber collar at the point of attachment that holds it upward so that it's less in the way. Comes in a variety of colors.

SHORTCOMING: The power switch is unintuitively located on the lower side of the mixer.

Our second favorite

KitchenAid 5-Speed Ultra Power Mixer

\$64.99

www.kitchenaid.com

800-541-6390

This five-speed KitchenAid mixer is nearly identical to the seven-speed model at left, making it nearly as impressive. It delivered both power and stamina in a well-balanced, compact design. There are just a few noteworthy differences between this model and the seven-speed version. The speeds are manually controlled with a sliding button. The first two speeds on the seven-speed model are slower than the initial speed on this model (the rpm for their highest speeds are equivalent). The five-speed model costs \$15 less.

For more recommended mixers, turn to p. 24.

What our tests revealed

In the course of testing hand mixers, it became clear that a lot of the modern extras included with these machines are a smokescreen to what really matters—that a hand mixer be forceful whether it's running at a slow or fast rate. Here are some common special features included with today's mixers that we found less than impressive.

Power burst: Meant to provide a burst of power when mixing gets tough, all it really does is create an unwieldy burst of speed that typically causes the mixer to buck. The best mixers in our tests didn't bog down, so this feature proved itself to be moot.

Delayed or slow start: Meant to prevent spattering, we found that if a mixer's lowest speed is properly slow (some start out at a startlingly rapid pace), then this feature isn't needed. Also, if the mixer is being reimmersed into a thick cookie dough, the slow, creeping delayed start doesn't have enough oomph to get the beaters going, so the motor bogs down.

Multiple speeds: We tested mixers with as few as three and as many as ten speeds. While we liked the versatility of our favorite mixer's seven speeds, it wasn't so much the quantity of the speeds as the quality. The best mixers start with a steady, gentle initial speed (no blasting off) and increase to a brisk but not unwieldy rate. In the tests, many mixers' highest speeds were so fast that egg whites whipped from soft peaks to stiff peaks in 10 to 15 seconds—and consequently overwhipped to a curdled consistency. Also, it isn't the speed of the beaters' rotation that matters but the horsepower behind them (technically known as torque). Many mixers couldn't get through the cookie dough at the desired moderate speed without bogging down, and increasing the speed often didn't help.

Digital clock: Meant to count up to keep track of the mixing time, the one model in our tests that had this feature shuddered so much that we were unable to read the rather tiny display. And as soon as the mixer was turned off momentarily to scrape the bowl's sides, the clock reverted to zero.

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This mixer might have just three speeds, but the quality of each speed provides all you need in a mixer. It weighs just 2 pounds and is refreshingly quiet. At its lowest speed, it confidently spun through a batch of thick cookie dough, never bogging down. The uniquely angled wires on the beaters aerate cream and egg whites unlike any other. In fact, they're so effective at whipping that for small volumes they're best used on medium speed to moderate the pace (see the sidebar at right). None of the extra attachments that come with this mixer—a dough hook, an immersion blender, and a mini chopper—were tested or considered in the ranking.

PERKS: Wire beaters with no center post make for easy cleanup and minimize the chance of dough clogs. A rubber ring around the edge of the base protects it from skidding when resting on the counter.

SHORTCOMINGS: Though comparatively light, the majority of its weight falls awkwardly in the front of the unit. The wide hand grip adds to a bulky feel. The beaters were somewhat fussy to insert. The mixer's flat, indented cord can be hard to clean.

Whips well

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Preferred to Cuisinart's five- and nine-speed versions, this mixer has a satisfying range of speeds, easy-to-use touchpad speed control, digital readout for speed level, and ample power for most mixing tasks. The easy-to-clean cord swivels at the point of attachment, making it less apt to get in the way. It weighs 2 pounds 8 ounces.

PERKS: In addition to wire beaters with no center post, this mixer comes with a wire balloon whisk that whips cream particularly well. The body is relatively compact. To eject the beaters, there's a lever to hook your finger under and pull up—much less resistant than the button mechanisms on top of most mixers.

SHORTCOMINGS: With a thick cookie dough, this mixer bogged down slightly. Increasing the speed one level solved the hesitation but also meant mixing at a faster rate than desired. "SmoothStart" delayed start is more like a momentary hesitation; it's also unnecessary, as the mixer's first speed is pleasantly low. ♦

How not to break your mixer, and other tips

- ❖ At all costs, resist the temptation to cream cold, hard butter with your hand mixer. It's one of the most common ways people burn out their machines. Instead, cut the cold butter into small pieces and let it sit out on the counter for 20 to 30 minutes, or until it's softened to 65° to 68°F.
- ❖ If your butter is adequately softened, add it to the mixing bowl in pieces and not as one big stick for more even and less arduous creaming.
- ❖ When mixing mashed potatoes, a stiff dough, or a double batch of cookie dough, use a large bowl with a wide base. The mixer can move better through ingredients when they're spread out rather than piled up.
- ❖ Never stick a spoon, spatula, or your hands in a mixing bowl while the mixer is running. It seems like an obvious point, but it happens all the time.
- ❖ When beating cream or egg whites, start slow and gradually build to a high speed. This avoids spatter and helps stabilize the foam.
- ❖ When adding flour or confectioners' sugar to a batter, turn off the mixer and blend the ingredient by hand just enough so that it won't scatter in a poof when you turn on the beaters.

Prices quoted are manufacturers' suggested retail. The other mixers tested for this article were (in alphabetical order): Black & Decker 5-speed PowerPro (model MX55); Cuisinart SmartPower 5-speed; Cuisinart SmartPower 9-speed; Hamilton Beach MixSmart (model 62000); Hamilton Beach 6-speed MixMate Ultra (model 62684); Krups 3Mix 8008 Combi; Proctor-Silex Easy Mix (model 62515); Sunbeam 6-speed Mixmaster (model 2486).



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Topping it off

BY WENDY KALEN

Pour these foolproof hot fudge and caramel sauces into shapely jars for giving (or to keep for yourself)

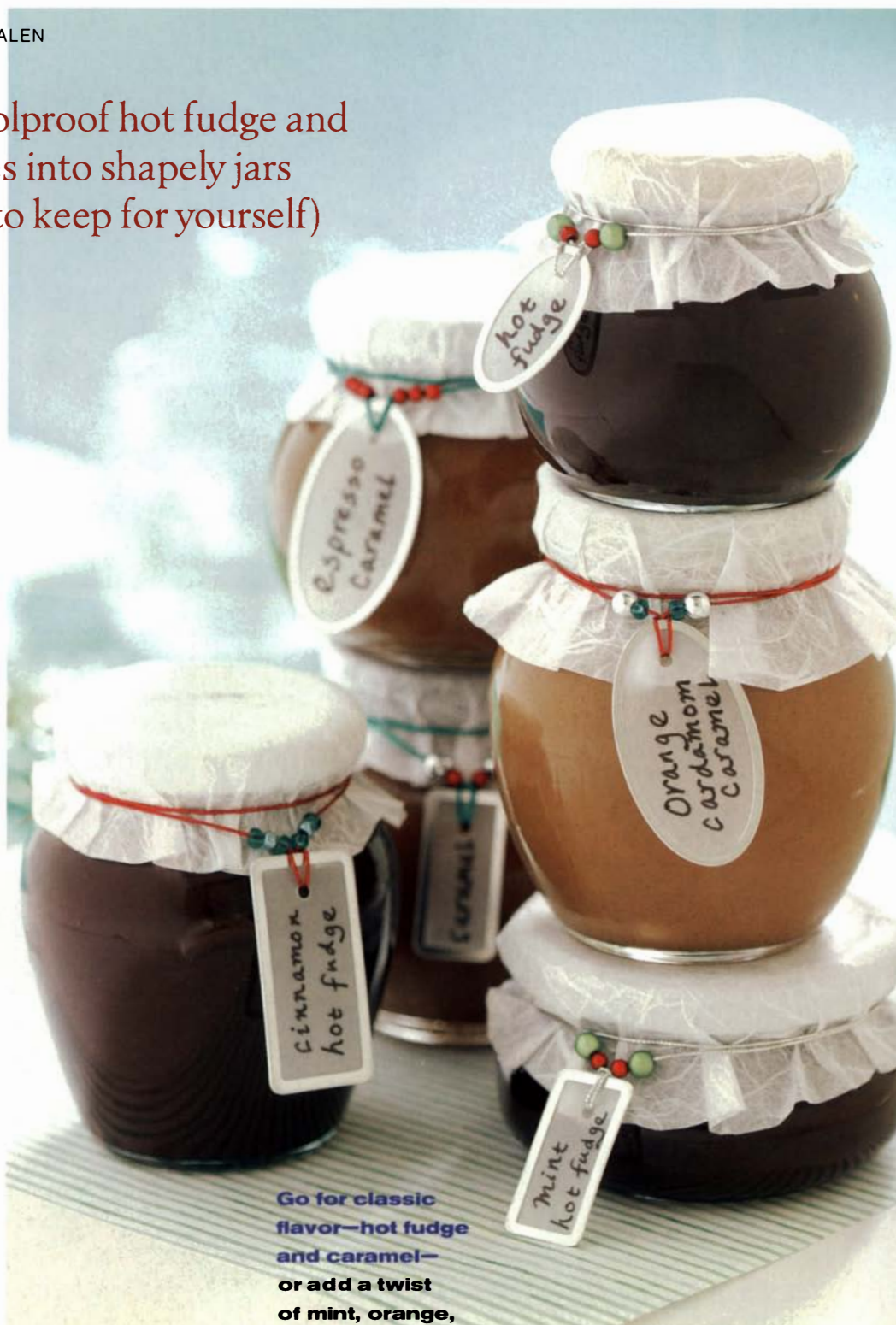
Who can resist chewy, chocolatey hot fudge draped over vanilla ice cream, or rich caramel sauce pooled beneath a portion of warm bread pudding? Certainly no one on my gift list. Dessert sauces make perfect holiday gifts. They can be packaged neatly into jars, and they hold for a good long while. And unlike the infamous fruitcake, you can be pretty darn sure everyone on your list is going to like caramel or hot fudge sauce. Each classic sauce recipe here also includes sophisticated flavor twists for more adventurous palates.

Both recipes make sizable quantities (5 to 6½ cups) so that they can fill several pint or half-pint jars and provide gifts for many (for a source for labels, see p. 88). You can make smaller batches, too: just halve the ingredients and remember that the cooking times will be shorter.

Since the flavoring ingredients are added after the sauce is made, you can flavor just a portion of the sauce if you like. A batch of caramel, for example, could be divided into three smaller batches so you can try the classic sauce as well as the espresso and orange-cardamom variations.

All these sauces go fabulously with ice cream. For something different, fill individual pastry shells with any of the sauces and garnish with fruit for an elegant holiday dessert. Or drizzle on dessert plates before serving slices of pie or cake; for more ideas, see pp. 28-30.

The sauces keep for about three months in the refrigerator, longer in the freezer. To serve, bring the caramel sauce to room temperature or warm it slightly. Warm the hot fudge gently in a double boiler, a microwave, or in a heatproof jar set in a pot of gently simmering water, stirring occasionally.



Go for classic flavor—hot fudge and caramel—or add a twist of mint, orange, espresso, or cinnamon.

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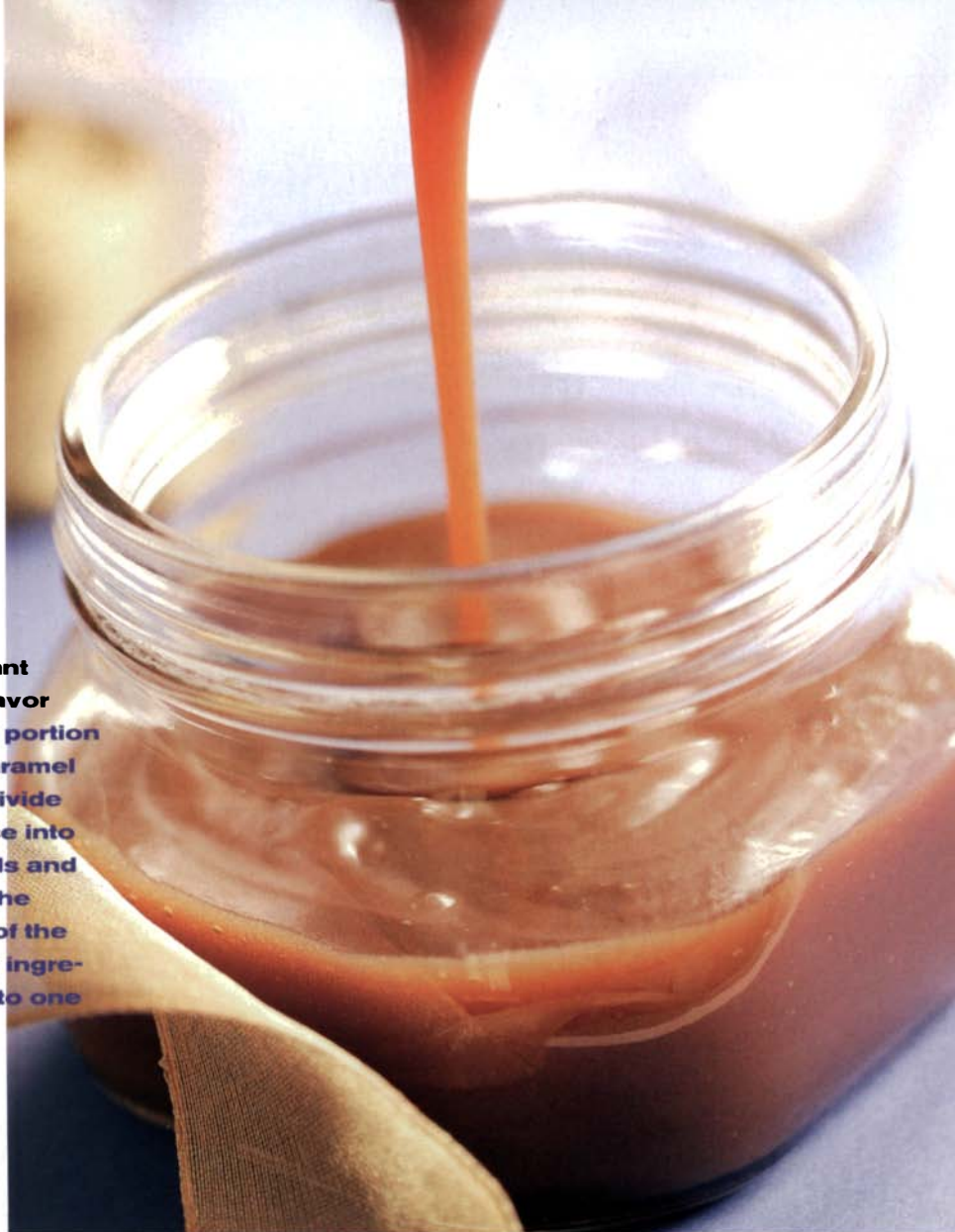
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If you want to add flavor to only a portion of the caramel sauce, divide the sauce into two bowls and stir half the amount of the flavoring ingredients into one portion.



Caramel Sauce

Yields about 6½ cups.

Sugar can burn easily, so use a heavy-based pot, preferably one that doesn't have a dark interior so that you can monitor the sugar once it begins to color.

4 cups granulated sugar
2 tablespoons light corn syrup
4 cups (1 quart) heavy cream,
at room temperature
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted
butter, softened and cut
into pieces
¼ teaspoon table salt

Set a small dish of water and a pastry brush by the stove. Pour 1 cup water into a heavy-based 8-quart saucepan or Dutch oven. Add the sugar and corn syrup. Cook over high heat, stirring often with a wooden spoon, until the mixture is clear and comes to a boil. If sugar crystals form on the sides of the pan, wash them down with a wet pastry brush.

Reduce the heat to maintain a gentle boil; it shouldn't be spattering. Don't stir but check frequently while boiling gently until the sugar begins to turn a light honey color in spots, about 20 minutes. Whenever sugar crystals form on the sides of the pan, wash them down with a wet pastry brush. Swirl the pan gently to even out the color. When the mixture reaches a rich, red-brown color, about another 8 minutes, take the pan off the heat. Slowly pour in the cream (be careful—the mixture will bubble vigorously and produce a lot of steam). Stir with a wooden spoon, making sure any solidified caramel on the pan bottom or sides melts. (If it doesn't, set the pan over medium-low heat and stir gently until the caramel is completely smooth.) Stir in the butter and salt. Let cool to room temperature before stirring in the flavorings (if using) and pouring into individual jars.

For easy cleaning, soak the pot and utensils in hot water. To loosen any cooked-on sugar, fill the pot with water and set it on the heat.

Caramel Sauce Variations

Espresso Caramel Sauce

Layer Bittersweet Brownies (p. 18E), vanilla ice cream, and a drizzle of this sauce for Brownie-Caramel Sundaes.

Dissolve 3 tablespoons instant espresso powder in 2 to 3 teaspoons hot water. Stir into the cooled caramel sauce (at right) to blend.

Orange-Cardamom Caramel Sauce

The sophisticated combination of orange and cardamom makes this caramel sauce a natural with gingerbread; it's also delicious drizzled over slices of fresh or roasted pineapple.

In a small saucepan, combine 1½ cups fresh orange juice with 2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons finely grated orange zest, bring to a boil, and cook until reduced to about ½ cup. Pour through a fine sieve, pressing against the zest to release all the liquid. Stir the strained, reduced orange juice and 4 teaspoons ground cardamom into the cooled caramel sauce (at right).

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To make your gift a little more special, package crunchy toppings in small containers (look in craft stores) to give with the sauce.

A few ideas: toffee pieces, chocolate chunks, crushed cookies, crystallized ginger, candied citrus zest, toasted coconut or nuts, chopped malted milk balls, or crushed peppermint candies.

Hot Fudge Sauce Variations

Mint Hot Fudge Sauce

The refreshing minty twist makes this hot fudge a perfect foil to angel food cake.

Stir 1 ½ teaspoons pure peppermint extract into the warm sauce (above).

Cinnamon Hot Fudge Sauce

With just a murmur of warm spice, this hot fudge sauce is great as a blanket for a frosty scoop of coffee ice cream.

Whisk ½ tablespoon ground cinnamon into the warm sauce (above). Taste and add more cinnamon if you like.

Hot Fudge Sauce

Yields about 5 cups.

Splurge on really good chocolate for this recipe, as the flavor will really shine through.

¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder (either natural or Dutch-processed)
¾ cup heavy cream
16 fluid ounces (2 cups) light corn syrup
1 pound semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
2½ ounces (5 tablespoons) unsalted butter
Pinch table salt

Put the cocoa in a heavy-based saucepan. Slowly pour in the cream and whisk until smooth. Add the corn syrup, chopped chocolate, butter, and salt. Set the pan over medium heat, stirring occasionally to combine. When the chocolate is melted and the mixture comes to a boil, reduce the heat and let boil gently until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes.

Let the sauce cool until it's just warm (steam should no longer rise from the sauce when it's stirred) before stirring in one of the flavor variations below or pouring into jars.

Wendy Kalen is a food writer and a food stylist; she also develops and tests recipes. She lives in Maplewood, New Jersey. ♦



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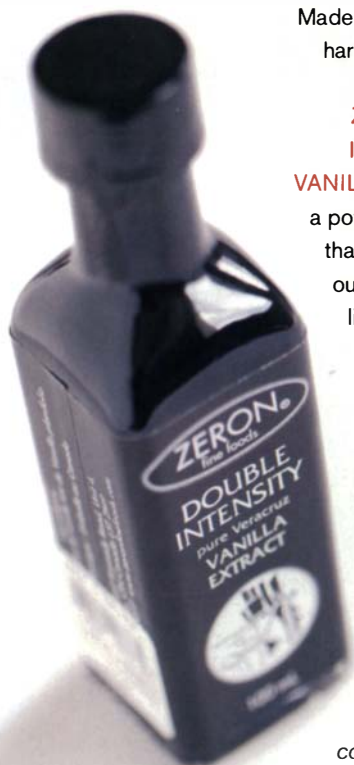
Tools & sweets to improve your baking

BY ANDREA PYENSON

If you're too busy to bake, **CLEARBROOK FARMS' MINI TART SHELLS** are just the thing for a quick holiday dessert. These buttery pastry shells have a crumbly texture similar to shortbread. Fill them with lemon curd, ganache, or caramel sauce (see p. 28) and top with nuts or a berry. Serve at room temperature or warm the filled shells in a 350°F oven for 10 minutes. \$5.95 for 24 at *Sur La Table* (800-243-0852; www.surlatable.com).



BAKER'S JOY is our favorite of the new style of nonstick sprays that contain both oil and flour (their aim is to grease and flour a pan in one quick spray). Cakes, brownies, and quick breads all easily released from pans we treated with Baker's Joy. Although the directions say to simply apply it to the bottom and sides of your baking pan, we prefer to blot the sprayed pan with a paper towel to ensure the spray is evenly distributed. \$2.49 at supermarkets nationwide, or for more information, call 800-333-0005.



Made from vanilla beans harvested in Mexico's Veracruz region, **ZERON DOUBLE INTENSITY PURE VANILLA EXTRACT** has a powerful floral aroma that shone through in our tests of desserts like biscotti, pound cake, muffins, and butterscotch brownies. Use the same amount as you would regular vanilla. \$14 for 100ml at *Dean & DeLuca* stores, or www.zeronfinefoods.com or www.dishcookingstudio.com.



A handful of **SCHARFFEN BERGER CHOCOLATE CHUNKS** jazzes up everything from traditional chocolate-chip cookies or congo bars to banana muffins or scones. These rich, dark chunks are made from the same high-quality cacao beans the company uses for its intense bittersweet chocolate. We've found they get jostled about when shipped and may look a little dusty; don't be concerned, as they still taste delicious. \$7.99 for 8 ounces at *Whole Foods* markets and *Chocolate Source* (800-214-4926; www.chocolatesource.com).



The crinkle cut of **ATECO'S FLUTED SQUARE CUTTERS** gives cookies and pastries a dressy touch. We like using the cutters to make window shortbread cookies (see p. 69), fancy sugar cookies, or even puff pastry cutouts—we've noticed that the edges of puff pastry rise higher, producing flakier pastry, when the cutters' edges are crinkled rather than straight. A 5-piece set is \$9.99 from *The Ultimate Baker* (www.cooksdream.com; 866-285-2665).

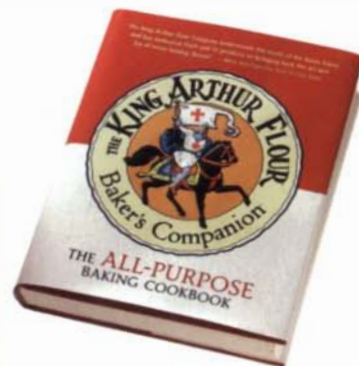


We hate measuring sticky ingredients like molasses and corn syrup because it's difficult to get them out of a measuring cup without making a mess—and leaving some behind. **MILMOUR'S WONDER CUP** is a great solution. Fill the adjustable cup (which has measurements in tablespoons, ounces, and milliliters) with the amount of an ingredient you need and then push up on the inner plastic piece to release it neatly. \$5.99 for the 1-cup measure; \$7.99 for the 2-cup measure at *Fante's Kitchen Wares* (800-443-2683; www.fantes.com).

CUISIPRO'S ACCUTEC COARSE GRATER works wonders with a block of chocolate. The stainless-steel grater's wide slotted blades and sharp edges produce small chocolate shavings that add an elegant touch to cakes and creamy desserts. We like to fold the shavings into angel food cake batter or whipped cream for a little twist. Note: To make soft curls, it helps to first warm the block of chocolate in the microwave for 5 to 15 seconds. \$16.50 at *Cooking.com*; 800-663-8810.



KAISER'S SQUARE SPRINGFORM PAN, with its tough nonstick coating, offers not only a unique shape but also easy release and clean-up, too. The shape is great for making cheesecakes to cut into neat squares for a dessert party. We also like to use the square springform when we make cakes with a streusel topping—it's easy to remove the cake without spoiling the top. \$39.99 at *Kitchenetc.com*; 800-232-4070.



The 650-page **KING ARTHUR FLOUR BAKER'S COMPANION** has a breadth of recipes to inspire experienced bakers as well as detailed instructions and helpful techniques to welcome beginners. The book's 450 recipes were thoroughly tested, and it showed in all the recipes we tried. Easy Cinnamon Bread delivered on its promise of simplicity as well as a crisp crust and a chewy, cinnamon-packed crumb. Moist, chewy Ultra-Butterscotch Brownies got a sweet boost from brown sugar and butterscotch chips. \$21 at *Jessica's Biscuit* (800-878-4264; www.ecookbooks.com).



Sticky Toffee Pudding

a Seductive British Sweet

BY ORLANDO MURRIN

Since the Victorian age, the British have prided themselves on their puddings; we even have a nickname for them—"puds" (rhymes with hoods). A pudding can take many forms—a milk pudding (such as rice), a sponge pudding (a cake batter baked in a dish), or a steamed pudding (the batter steams in a bowl set over boiling water). With the odd exception, puddings are sweet, and when a British child calls out, "What's for pud, Mum?" he or she is actually asking, "What's for dessert?"

I first sampled sticky toffee pudding—a sponge cake fragrant with caramel and vanilla, richly studded with squidgy dates, and oozing with a creamy toffee sauce—at

Sticky Toffee Pudding

Serves six to eight; yields about 1 1/3 cups sauce.

Baking soda (known as bi-carb to Brits) plays two roles in this recipe: It helps soften the dates, and it helps the wet, heavy batter rise during baking. If you can only find golden sugar in regular granulation, just blend it in a food processor for 1 or 2 minutes to get a superfine texture.

FOR THE CAKE:

- 2 ounces (1/4 cup) unsalted butter**, softened at room temperature; more for the pan
- 6 ounces (1 cup lightly packed) pitted dates** (Medjools, if possible), coarsely chopped
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- 6 ounces (3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons) golden superfine sugar** (or white superfine sugar), sifted if lumpy

- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- 2 large eggs**
- 6 ounces (1 1/4 cups plus 1 tablespoon) self-rising flour**, sifted

FOR THE SAUCE:

- 1/2 cup packed light or dark muscovado sugar** (or light brown sugar)
- 1/4 cup honey**
- 4 ounces (1/2 cup) unsalted butter**
- 1/4 cup heavy cream**

Vanilla ice cream for serving (optional)

Make the cake: Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 11x7-inch nonstick baking pan that's at least 1 inch deep. If your pan isn't nonstick, butter the sides and then line it with enough parchment to come 1 inch up the short sides; butter the parchment as well.

Put the dates in a small saucepan with 1 cup water and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer until softened, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, stir in the baking soda, and set aside. (The mixture will foam up and take on a greenish color; this is normal.)

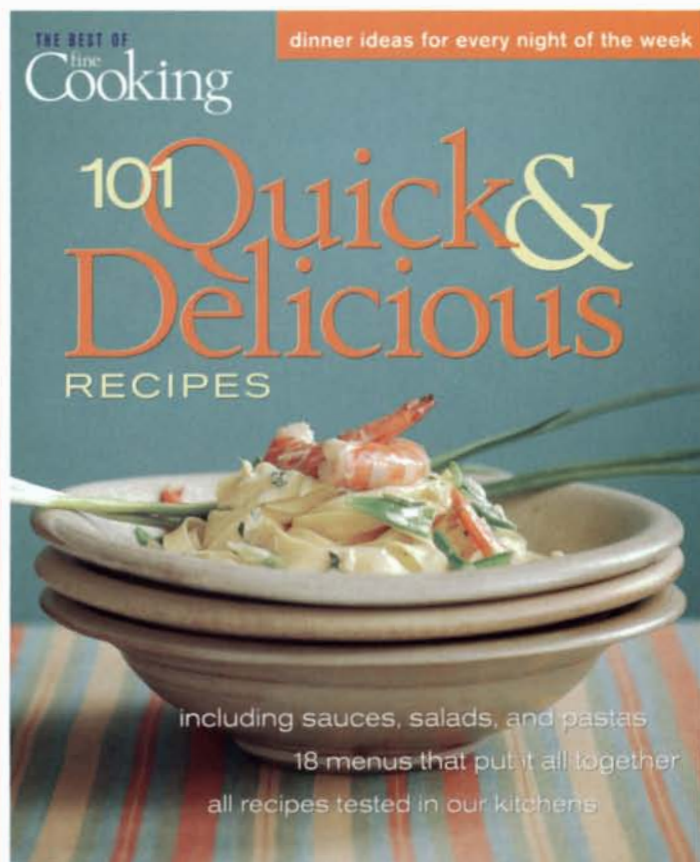
Combine the butter and the golden sugar in a bowl. Beat with a hand mixer on high speed until the mixture is well combined and lighter in color, about 4 minutes. Beat in the vanilla. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. With a wooden spoon, stir in the flour and then stir in the date mixture; the batter will be sloppy. Pour the batter into the greased pan and bake until it's risen, a deep golden brown, and firm to the touch but still a bit spongy (it should spring back a little,

but not entirely, when indented), 35 to 40 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the

sauce: Put the muscovado sugar, honey, and butter in a small saucepan and heat gently, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Bring to a simmer and cook until it thickens and gets bubbly, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in the cream, let it bubble down, and then remove the pan from the heat.

To serve: When the cake is done, remove it from the oven and let it rest for 5 minutes; then turn it out onto a cutting board and invert it onto a wire rack to cool slightly. Cut the warm cake into slices or squares, put on serving plates along with a scoop of ice cream, if using, and drench with the sauce.



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The Ivy, one of London's most popular restaurants, in the early 1990s. The dessert had become wildly popular just a few years earlier, and The Ivy's was known as the quintessential version. I remember that I had no intention of finishing the dish because it seemed so rich and buttery, but when I looked down at my plate, my pud was all gone.

One dessert, many variations

Sticky toffee pudding first appeared in the 1960s. Two separate establishments claim to have invented it—The Udney Arms, a pub-restaurant in Scotland, and the up-scale Sharrow Bay Restaurant in England. Since then, The Cartmel Sticky Toffee Pudding Company and its American offshoot in Santa Monica, California, have turned the pud into big business, selling packaged versions to stores and to mail-order customers.

There are many variations of sticky toffee pudding, but the basic elements remain the same: dates, sponge cake, vanilla, brown sugar, and cream. Some laborious recipes ask you to steam the cake batter in a deep bowl over boiling water, like a Christmas pudding. At The Ivy, they bake it in a jellyroll tin and roll it up. I think the simplest way is best: Bake it in a baking pan, cut it into slices, pour hot caramelly sauce all over. The contrast of soft, chewy cake and sweet, unctuous sauce is simply gorgeous, and you can up the sensuality another notch by serving it with ice cream.

It's all do-ahead

This is something of a special-occasion dessert, perfect for company because you can make it ahead. You can bake the cake earlier in the day or even the day before and reheat it (turned out), wrapped in foil, before serving. For the sauce, have all the ingredients in the pan before guests arrive, so it's ready to cook at the last minute. If you plan to serve it with ice cream, a trick popular just now with British hosts and hostesses is to make neat scoops of ice cream in advance and keep them in the freezer on a foil-lined tray. Then you can just pop a scoop on each plate as it goes to the table.

Orlando Murrin is the editor of BBC Good Food, Britain's best-selling monthly food magazine. ♦

For an authentic “pud,” you’ll need three quintessentially British ingredients

Dates

Although they don't grow in Britain, dates are integral to British cooking. We were among the first to import them from the Middle East in the 19th century. Back then, dates were an exotic, expensive treat, and they're still a traditional component in elaborate Christmas desserts.

In sticky toffee pudding, chopped dates are part of the cake. They seem to melt into the batter during baking so that the cake that emerges doesn't taste at all like a “date cake” but just a sweet, rich, moist treat.

You can make this recipe with any type of date, but for flavor and texture you can't beat, use Medjools (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88), which are sweet, chewy, and succulent. Slice them in half, remove the pit, and chop them roughly.



Partially refined sugars

The British are among the world's top consumers of sugar, and in most of our supermarkets you can choose from at least a dozen types. Partially refined sugars (as opposed to fully refined, which is white sugar) are becoming popular in Britain. They can often be used in place of regular white sugar but contribute a more interesting flavor because they still contain some molasses. For the cake, I use golden sugar, a partially refined sugar that's sold in regular granulation or superfine. It gives a delicate caramel flavor and pale brown tint to dishes. If you can't find golden superfine sugar (also called golden baker's sugar), you can substitute superfine white sugar. For the sauce, I like muscovado sugar, another partially refined sugar, available either light or dark. Muscovado sugar is worth seeking out for its delicious molasses flavor; if you can't get it, regular light brown sugar is an acceptable substitute, though the sauce won't have the same depth of flavor. For sources for both sugars, see p. 88.



Cream

The British also love dairy products. Double cream, the British equivalent of heavy cream, contains a hefty 48% fat and is the usual pick for this recipe. (And if you think that sounds rich, Devon or Cornwall clotted cream, so thick a spoon will stand up in it, is 60% fat.) At 36% to 40% fat, American heavy cream works perfectly well in this recipe.





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WINNING TIP

Bake custards in small canning jars to give away

I like to bring caramel custards baked in pretty ramekins or soufflé dishes when visiting friends during the holidays, but it's a chore to collect my baking dishes days or weeks later. Now I bake my custards in small, shallow, wide-mouth canning jars—since the jars are relatively inexpensive, they don't need to be reclaimed. I use 8-ounce canning jars with slightly sloping sides. Canning jars are made to withstand boiling water, so I can safely bake them in a low oven in a water bath. Once the custards cool, I screw the canning jar ring and lid back on each jar, add a ribbon and a decorative label with the recipe's name, the “eat by” date, and refrigeration instructions. If you're making crème caramel, be sure to heat the jars before pouring in the hot caramel. This is easily done by putting the jars on a tray in a low oven (about 225°F) or by taking them hot from the dishwasher.

—Mary Kerr,
San Carlos, California

Uncurling parchment

To straighten rolled parchment, cut a piece to size, place one half of the sheet over the edge of the counter and put your forearm lightly over the paper. Pull the bottom end of the parchment over the counter's edge toward the floor, then reverse the parchment and repeat to uncurl the other half.

—Carol Bradshaw, via email

Use a measuring cup to tamp down brown sugar

When I measure brown sugar with a cup from my set of nesting measuring cups, I use the next smaller size cup to tamp down the brown sugar for the

“packed brown sugar” called for in the recipe.

—R. Poole, via email

Keeping a food scale clean

I own the Salter electronic kitchen scale that you recommended in last year's *Holiday Baking* (*Fine Cooking* #54). I store and use my scale in a large plastic zip-top bag. This keeps the scale clean and dry, and I don't have to worry about food becoming trapped between the balance platform and the display base. The bag is easy to wipe clean after each use, and easy to replace when it's torn or old.

—Calli Barry,
Honolulu, Hawaii

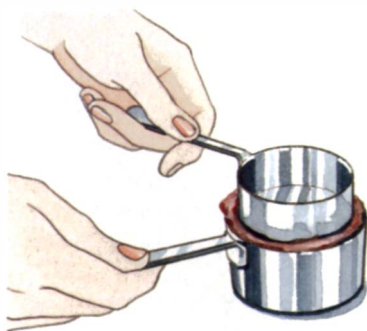
Mixing baking ingredients thoroughly

When mixing dry ingredients that include baking powder or baking soda, add any dark spices to the mix last. When you see that the dark spices (like ground cinnamon or cloves) are thoroughly mixed, you know that your rising agents have been evenly distributed through the other dry ingredients, too.

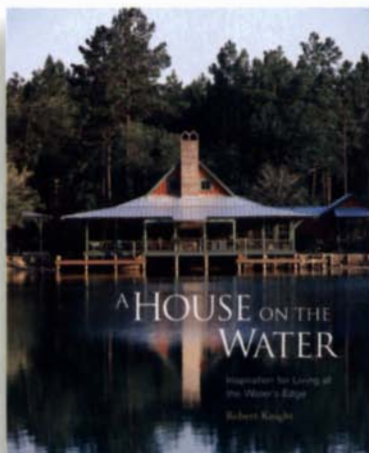
—Lynn Burgess,
Toronto, Ontario

Two ideas for streamlined cookie baking

If you bake a lot of cookies during the holidays, buy enough baking sheets so that when you take the



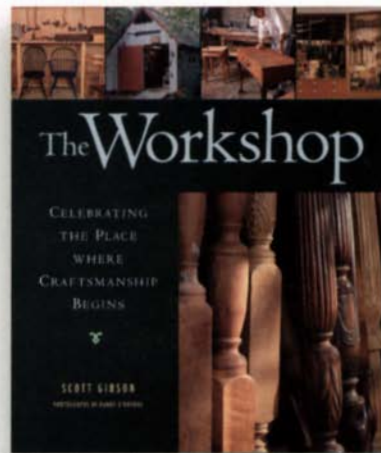
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first batch of cookies out of the oven, you have the next batch prepped and ready to go. This way, you won't have to wait for the sheets to cool down before starting the next batch. I also bought an extra oven shelf so I could bake even more cookies at the same time. Be sure to space your shelves evenly in the oven and rotate your baking sheets and swap their positions to ensure even baking.

—Colleen Lanigan-Ambrose,
Seal Beach, California

Chopping dried fruit easily

I like to bake, but I don't like the way ingredients like figs, dates, and raisins stick to my knife during chopping. To prevent this, I sprinkle a little flour over the dried fruit before and after I chop. The first dusting keeps the fruit from sticking to my knife, and the second coats the individual pieces and keeps them nicely separated during mixing.

—Deborah Waldner-Khan,
Waterloo, Ontario

A seam roller helps even out pastry crust

Pastry crusts that must be patted into the pan by hand tend to be uneven—too thick in some places and too thin in others. To even them out, I use a wallpaper seam roller that's 1¼ inches wide. It works best in a rectangular pan. Just cover the dough with plastic wrap and gently go over it with the seam roller. This gives me a consistent thickness without finger indentations.

—Ruth Clapham,
Onsted, Michigan

A trick for stubborn tarts

If your tart gets stuck and won't come out of the pan without breaking, put it in the freezer for 20 to 30 minutes. The tart will release cleanly from the pan.

—Mean Chef, via CooksTalk
on www.finecooking.com



Mark baking pans with their volumes

I mark the volumes of all of my baking pans, flan tins, cake tins, etc., on the back of the pan with a permanent marker. The best time to do this is when you've just bought the pan and you can copy the volume measurements from the packaging labels. To measure the volume of an old baking pan, fill the pan with water to within ¼ inch of the rim and then pour the water into a liquid measuring cup like a Pyrex measure that's marked with cup measurements and fluid ounces.

—Jane Becketel, via email



Baking perfectly round refrigerator cookies

When I started making refrigerator cookies many years ago, the roll of dough would get flat on one side from sitting on the fridge shelf, and the cookies would end up misshapen rather than round. To prevent this, I roll the dough to a diameter slightly smaller than an empty paper towel roll, wrap the dough with waxed paper, and slide the wrapped dough into the cardboard cylinder. The cylinder is just the right length for the dough, and it's stiff enough so that the dough doesn't flatten when I put it in the refrigerator or freezer. When I'm ready to

bake, I just slide the dough out and slice the cookies. I get perfect rounds every time.

—Maria Olaguera-Delegu,
Outremont, Quebec

A new use for an old pillowcase

While making a jellyroll, I found I didn't have a dishtowel large enough to turn the cake onto, so I used a clean cotton pillowcase. I dusted the pillowcase with cocoa powder to keep it from sticking, flipped the cake onto it, and rolled it up. It worked beautifully. The pillowcase provided plenty of overhang to keep the cake covered. Afterward, I shook the extra cocoa out of the pillowcase, threw it in the wash, and it came out perfectly clean.

—Robin Hart, via email

Nonstick spray helps portion sticky dough

While making the Cheddar-Pecan Gougères from last year's *Holiday Baking* (*Fine Cooking* #54), I had a hard time portioning the dough for the puffs; my ice-cream scoop was reluctant to release the dense, sticky dough onto the parchment. I stopped and cleaned off the scoop, sprayed it with nonstick cooking spray, and tried again. It worked like a charm—the scoop willingly released the balls of dough.

—Chlöe Wodjenski,
New Milford, Connecticut

Fill a pastry bag neatly

To easily fill a pastry bag, put the tip in place and put the bag into a tall glass. Turn the top of the bag over the edge of the glass to make a cuff and hold the bag steady. Fill the pastry bag, turn up the cuff, and pipe away. You'll appreciate this method when you have to refill the pastry bag.

—Jeanie James,
Mukilteo, Washington ♦

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Big or Small, Four Easy Cakes for Gift Giving or Entertaining

BY NICOLE REES

I love cakes. I love to eat them, I love to make them, and I love to give them away to friends and family. If you so much as pass by my house around the holidays, I am likely to rush out and offer you one. Not just any type of cake, mind you, but a dense, moist, flavorful cake with a hearty crumb.

Why cake, you wonder, and not cookies or pie? The shameful truth is that I find making these cakes isn't nearly as fussy as baking batch after batch of cookies or pies. With a stand mixer or an electric hand mixer, you'll find that these cakes are easy to throw together—just add the ingredients to the bowl at the proper intervals and watch the silky, fluffy cake batter come together.

Not all cake batters are created equal.

Layer cakes have a lot of moisture in the batter, and when confined to a deep pan, like a bundt, they don't bake properly. By the time the liquid evaporates and the batter sets, the edges of the cake are dried out or, worse, the cake has fallen. My holiday cakes are different. The batters have a relatively low liquid content that does well in deep pans, and they contain an ample amount of eggs and butter to keep the cakes moist.

For foolproof tenderness, I first aerate the batter by thoroughly creaming the butter with the sugar as I would to make an old-fashioned pound cake. I also use





chemical leavens—baking soda or baking powder—to open the crumb. Technically, chemical leavens only expand the air bubbles already present in batters, and I use them here to create a little lift and to change the crumb from springy to tender.

The result is a cake somewhere between a rich, dense pound cake and a tender, fluffy layer cake—what we commonly call bundt cake these days. There's no tedious assembly of cake layers or finicky buttercreams required. In fact, this type of cake is perfectly elegant with a dusting of confectioners' sugar or a simple glaze.

These cakes are designed to let you vary the shapes and sizes. The results are amazingly festive. For example, the chocolate stout cake recipe will yield one big, beautiful bundt cake (perfect for entertaining) or a dozen irresistible miniature bundt cakes (perfect for giving).

Bold flavors and special ingredients are the hallmarks of holiday baking, a way of letting people know that this is a special occasion. Old classics are made more interesting here by pairing chocolate with stout, or the flavor of gingerbread with espresso, or almond paste with tart cranberries. Most of the cakes come with flavorful glazes that are optional. If you don't make the glaze, lightly sift confectioners' sugar over the cakes right before serving for a finishing touch.

Made to last. There's also a perfectly practical justification for why I love to make these cakes for the holidays: stamina. The high amount of butter, sugar, and eggs ensures that the cakes have some staying power. Wrapped tightly in plastic, I've found that these cakes will hold up for as long as a week. You can also bake them up to a month ahead and freeze them, giving you the same smug feeling as getting your Christmas shopping done in July.

Gift idea: Scour thrift stores for china plates, baskets, or silver trays, which make nice keepsakes after the cake is gone.



Cranberry & Almond Bundt Cake

Yields 1 large bundt cake or 12 miniature bundt cakes.

6¾ ounces (1 ½ cups) all-purpose flour; more for the pan
1½ teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan
7 ounces (about ¾ cup) almond paste (not marzipan)
1 cup granulated sugar
4 large eggs, at room temperature
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¼ cup milk, at room temperature
1½ cups fresh or thawed frozen cranberries, picked through, rinsed, and coarsely chopped
Confectioners' sugar for dusting (optional)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 10- or 12-cup bundt or kugelhupf pan (or twelve 1-cup mini bundt pans). Tap out any excess flour.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt. With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, beat the butter and almond paste in a large bowl on medium speed

until smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the sugar and beat until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Beat in the eggs one at a time, stopping the mixer to scrape the bowl after each addition. Beat in the vanilla. With the mixer on low speed, alternate adding the flour mixture and the milk, beginning and ending with the flour. Stop the mixer at least one last time to scrape the bowl and then beat at medium speed until the batter is smooth, about 20 seconds. Fold in the cranberries with a rubber spatula.

Spoon the batter into the prepared pan (or pans), spreading it evenly with a rubber spatula. Run a knife through the batter to eliminate any air pockets. Bake until a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out clean, 40 to 45 minutes (about 20 minutes for mini cakes). Set the pan on a rack to cool for 20 minutes. Invert the cake onto the rack, remove the pan, and let the cake cool completely. If you're making the cake ahead, wrap it while still barely warm. Serve at room temperature, dusting the top with confectioners' sugar, if you like.



Espresso Gingerbread Cake

Yields 1 large bundt cake or 4 miniature loaves.

½ cup dark molasses (not blackstrap)
½ cup very strong brewed coffee or espresso, cooled to just warm
11¼ ounces (2½ cups) all-purpose flour; more for the pan
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda
1 tablespoon instant espresso powder
2 teaspoons ground ginger
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
⅛ teaspoon ground or freshly grated nutmeg
⅛ teaspoon ground cloves
10 ounces (1¼ cups) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan
1¼ cups packed light brown sugar
3 large eggs plus 2 large egg yolks, at room temperature
Espresso Glaze (optional; see the recipe at right)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 10- or 12-cup bundt pan (or four 2-cup mini loaf pans). Tap out any excess flour.

In a liquid measuring cup, whisk the molasses with the brewed coffee. Sift the flour with the baking powder, salt, baking soda, espresso powder, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves.

With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, cream the butter in a large bowl on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Add the brown sugar and beat until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Beat in the eggs and yolks one at a time, stopping to scrape the bowl after each addition. With the mixer on low speed, alternate adding the flour and coffee mixtures, beginning and ending with the flour. Stop the mixer at least one last time to scrape the bowl and then beat at medium speed until the batter is smooth, about 20 seconds.

Spoon the batter into the prepared pan (or pans), spreading it evenly with a rubber spatula. Run a knife through the batter to eliminate any air pockets. Bake until a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out clean, about 40 minutes (about 30 minutes for mini

Gift idea: To give specially shaped pans as gifts, bake the cake in the pan, wash the pan as the cake cools, and return the cake to the pan before wrapping.

loaves). Set the pan on a rack to cool for 15 minutes. Invert the cake onto the rack, remove the pan, and let cool until just barely warm. Drizzle with the glaze (if using) and

then let cool to room temperature before serving. If you're making the cake ahead, wrap it while still barely warm without the glaze. If you plan to freeze the cake, don't glaze it until you're ready to serve it or give it away.

ESPRESSO GLAZE (OPTIONAL):

1 cup confectioners' sugar
1 teaspoon dark rum (optional)
1½ tablespoons brewed espresso (or 1½ teaspoons instant espresso powder dissolved in 1½ tablespoons hot water)

Combine the confectioners' sugar and rum (if using) in a bowl and, adding the espresso gradually, whisk until smooth. If necessary, add more espresso or water to thin the glaze to a drizzling consistency. When the cake is still barely warm, use a fork or spoon to drizzle the glaze over the top.



Chocolate Stout Cake

Yields 1 large bundt cake or 12 miniature bundt cakes.

1¼ cups stout, such as Guinness (don't include the foam when measuring)
⅓ cup dark molasses (not blackstrap)
7½ ounces (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
2¼ ounces (¾ cup) unsweetened natural cocoa powder (not Dutch-processed); more for the pan
1½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon table salt
10 ounces (1¼ cups) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan
1½ cups packed light brown sugar
3 large eggs, at room temperature
6 ounces semisweet chocolate, very finely chopped
Chocolate Glaze (optional; see the recipe right)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 10- or 12-cup bundt pan (or twelve 1-cup mini bundt pans) and then lightly coat with sifted cocoa powder. Tap out any excess cocoa.

In a small saucepan over high heat, bring the stout and molasses to a

simmer. Remove the pan from the heat and let stand while preparing the cake batter.

Sift together the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, cream the butter in a large bowl on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Add the brown sugar and beat on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Stop to scrape the sides of the bowl as needed. Beat in the eggs one at a time, stopping to scrape the bowl after each addition. With the mixer on low speed, alternate adding the flour and stout mixtures, beginning and ending with the flour. Stop the mixer at least one last time to scrape the bowl and then beat at medium speed until the batter is smooth, about 20 seconds. Stir in the chopped chocolate.

Spoon the batter into the prepared pan (or pans), spreading it evenly with a rubber spatula. Run a knife through the batter to eliminate any air pockets. Bake until a wooden skewer inserted

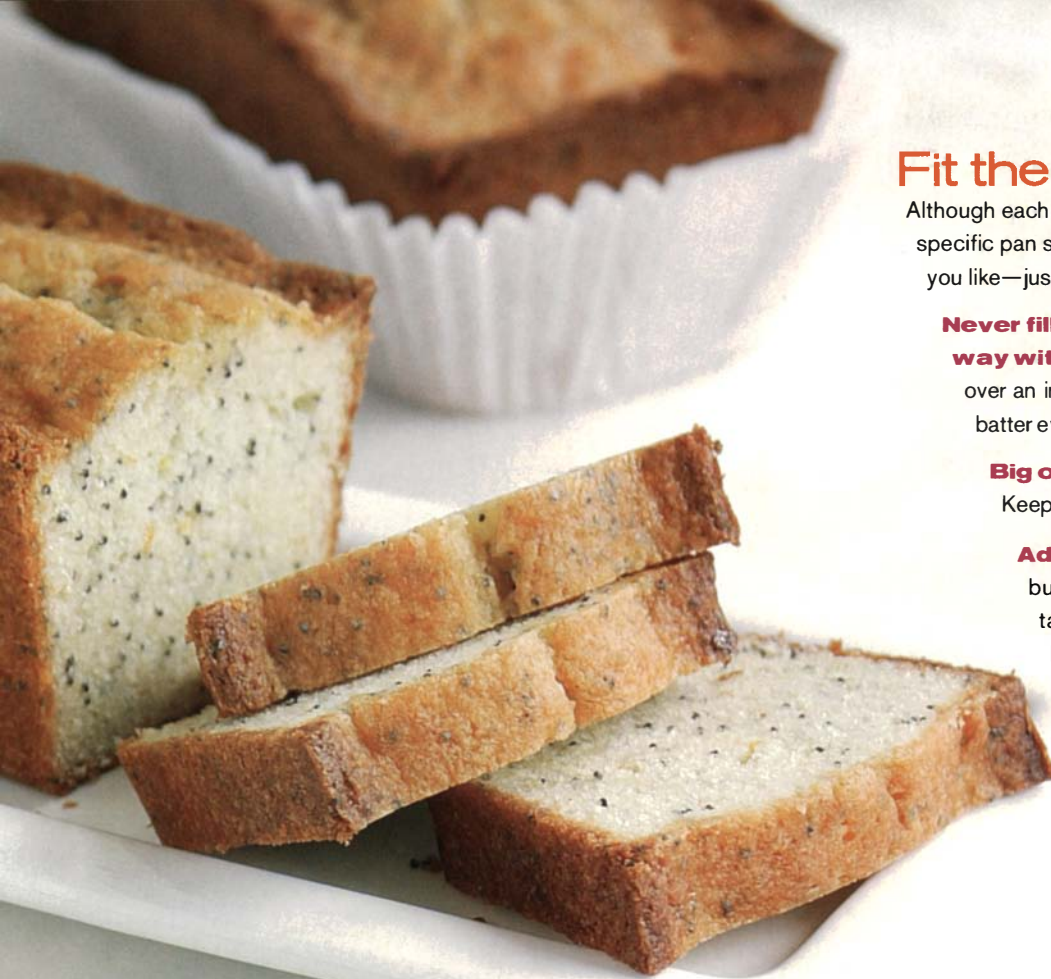
Gift idea: Make a gift basket to go along with the cake. Include the recipe and any special ingredients like coffee beans, gourmet chocolate, or stout.

in the center comes out with only a few moist crumbs clinging to it, 45 to 50 minutes (about 35 minutes for mini cakes). Set the pan on a rack to cool for 20 minutes. Invert

the cake onto the rack and remove the pan. Let cool until just barely warm. Drizzle with the glaze (if using) and then let cool to room temperature before serving. If you're making the cake ahead, wrap it while still barely warm without the glaze. If you plan to freeze the cake, don't glaze it until you're ready to serve it or give it away.

CHOCOLATE GLAZE (OPTIONAL):
¾ cup heavy cream
6 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped

Bring the cream to a boil in a small saucepan over high heat. Remove the pan from the heat and add the chocolate. Let stand for 1 minute and then whisk until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Let cool for 5 minutes before drizzling over the barely warm cake.



Orange-Poppyseed Pound Cake

Yields 2 medium or 8 miniature loaves.

12 ounces (2½ cups) all-purpose flour; more for the pan
1½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon table salt
⅓ cup poppyseeds
2½ cups granulated sugar
4 teaspoons finely grated orange zest
12 ounces (1½ cups) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan
8 ounces cream cheese, softened at room temperature
6 large eggs plus 2 large egg yolks, at room temperature
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Orange Glaze (see the recipe at right)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour two 9x5x3-inch loaf pans (or eight 5½x3-inch mini loaf pans, each with a 2-cup capacity). Tap out any excess flour.

In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt; whisk in the poppyseeds. Put the sugar and orange zest in a food processor and

pulse for 20 seconds. (If you don't have a food processor, omit this step and blend the zest into the flour.)

With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, beat the butter and cream cheese in a large bowl on medium speed until smooth and creamy, about 2 minutes. Add the sugar and beat until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Beat in the whole eggs one at a time, stopping the mixer to scrape the bowl after each addition. Beat in the egg yolks and vanilla. With the mixer on low speed, slowly add the flour mixture. Stop the mixer at least one last time to scrape the bowl and then beat at medium speed until the batter is smooth, about 10 seconds.

Spoon the batter into the prepared pans, spreading it evenly with a rubber spatula. Run a knife through the batter to eliminate any air pockets or tap the pan lightly against the counter. Bake until a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out with only a few moist crumbs clinging to it, about 50 minutes (25 to 30 minutes for mini loaves). Set

Fit the cake to your mold

Although each cake recipe here comes with directions for specific pan sizes, you can use whatever shape or size pan you like—just follow these four simple guidelines.

Never fill the pan more than two-thirds of the way with batter. For full-size loaf or bundt pans, leave over an inch of space at the top. For mini pans, divide the batter evenly so the cakes bake at the same rate.

Big or small, these cakes do well at 350°F. Keep the oven temperature the same for any size pan.

Adjust your timing to fit the pan. Full-size bundts take 40 to 50 minutes. Standard loaves take 45 to 50 minutes. Mini bundts and mini loaves take anywhere from 20 to 35 minutes.

Know the signs of doneness. The chocolate stout cake and poppyseed pound cake are done when a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out with only a few moist crumbs clinging to it. For the gingerbread cake and cherry-almond bundt cake, the skewer should come out clean. (For mini cakes, use a toothpick instead of a skewer.)

the pan on a rack to cool for 10 minutes. Remove the cake from the pan; brush while warm with the glaze, following the instructions below. Serve at room temperature.

ORANGE GLAZE:

⅔ cup fresh orange juice
⅓ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon orange liqueur, such as Cointreau

Strain the orange juice into a small saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Stir in the sugar and continue to cook until the mixture thickens and is reduced to a scant ½ cup, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the liqueur. Brush the tops and sides of the cake while it's still warm. Repeat brushing every few minutes until all the glaze has been used. Let the cake cool completely before wrapping.

To wrap the glazed cakes for gift giving or freezing, spread a small amount of vegetable oil onto a sheet of plastic wrap with your fingers and place the oiled side against the cake.

Sweet & Simple Rustic

You don't need lots of little pans to make these individual cranberry-raisin tarts

BY KAREN BARKER

While I could just as well entertain with one big, delicious tart, I love the way little tarts personalize a party. And unlike most individual desserts that require a stack of miniature pans or baking dishes, these rustic cranberry tarts (also called galettes) are free-form, requiring only your everyday baking sheet and a sheet of parchment.

This is the kind of dessert anyone can make. The dough comes together in the food processor, and it doesn't require any pastry-making experience. Yet for all its simplicity, you'll be amazed by the delicate, buttery pastry this recipe produces.

You can fill a rustic tart with just about any type of fruit, but I like cranberries. For one thing, they're beautiful—ruby cranberries tossed with golden raisins create a jewel-like filling that looks festive. And for me, that tart-against-sweet flavor is what makes the filling so intriguing.

You can make the pastry and the filling ahead. Wrap the dough in plastic and refrigerate it for up to two days (or freeze it for up to one month; just defrost it overnight in the refrigerator before using it). You can refrigerate the filling for up to two days.

I like to serve these little tarts warm (not hot), so I assemble and bake them just before guests arrive. You can also bake them further ahead and warm them in a 350°F oven for 5 minutes before serving.

What you can do ahead

You can make the dough and the filling in advance, but the tarts should be assembled and baked the day you serve them.

Rustic Cranberry-Raisin Tarts

Yields 6 individual tarts.

Make the dough:

6¾ ounces (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
3 tablespoons granulated sugar
¼ teaspoon table salt
6 ounces (12 tablespoons) cold unsalted butter, cut into pieces
2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon cold water

Make the filling:

3 cups fresh cranberries
1 cup golden raisins
¾ cup granulated sugar; more to taste
¼ cup pure maple syrup
2 tablespoons orange liqueur, such as Grand Marnier
Finely grated zest of 1 orange
1 tablespoon fresh orange juice
⅛ teaspoon table salt



Put the flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor and pulse to combine. Add the butter and pulse until the mixture resembles coarse meal. Add the water and pulse until the dough just starts to come together (see the photo above). Take care not to over-process. Turn the dough out onto a work surface and press it into a cohesive ball. Divide it into six equal balls and put each on a sheet of plastic. Press the balls into disks and wrap well with the plastic. Refrigerate the dough until firm, 1 hour (or hold in the refrigerator for up to two days).



In a medium saucepan, combine 2 cups of the cranberries with the raisins, sugar, maple syrup, orange liqueur, orange zest and juice, and salt. Bring to a simmer over medium heat. Cook, stirring occasionally until the sugar has dissolved, the cranberries have popped open, and the mixture is quite thick and syrupy, about 6 minutes. Taste the mixture. If it seems too tart, add more sugar. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the remaining 1 cup cranberries. Let the filling cool to room temperature (it will thicken to a jam-like consistency). Once cool, the filling can be refrigerated for up to two days.

Tarts

Shape and bake the tarts:

3 tablespoons gingersnap
cookie crumbs (from about
6 cookies)

Granulated sugar for sprinkling
Lightly sweetened whipped
cream for serving

Position oven racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment. About 15 minutes before rolling the dough, take it out of the refrigerator so that it becomes malleable.



On a lightly floured surface, roll each disk of dough into a 5½- to 6-inch round. Transfer three rounds to each baking sheet and sprinkle the gingersnap crumbs evenly over the surface of each round, leaving a scant 1-inch border.



Dollop the cooled filling into the center of each dough round. Use the back of a spoon to spread the filling evenly, leaving a 1-inch border.



Gently fold the border over the filling, pleating as you go, to partially enclose the filling. Lightly press the pleats together to seal. Sprinkle the crust with sugar. Bake until the pastry is golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes, rotating the baking sheets halfway through. Serve warm or at room temperature with whipped cream on the side.



Something for everyone. A sweet-tangy filling and a buttery crust make these tarts the perfect ending to a holiday meal.

Karen Barker is a co-owner of and pastry chef at Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina. ♦

Trading Cookies

Readers share their favorite cookies; our baking expert Abby Dodge selects the best

Have you ever been to a cookie exchange? You know, the kind of party where everyone brings several batches of one type of cookie, a colossal swap occurs, and everyone goes home with a big variety of holiday cookies. Well, we hope you'll consider this article as a sort of "virtual" cookie exchange among *Fine Cooking* readers. When we put a call out for recipes, we knew we'd get some mail, but were truly delighted at the hundreds of recipes that came from all over the country, from Canada, and even from England. Contributing editor Abby Dodge had a tough time narrowing down, testing, and judging the final recipes to be published, but she ended up with a fantastic selection that includes delicious renditions of popular classics like spritz cookies as well as some unusual treats like the Potato-Chip Cookie—it's excellent.



Jennifer Weglowski's Cream Cheese Spritz Cookies

Yields about 100 cookies, depending on size and style.

Courtesy of Jennifer's grandmother, the recipe for this sweet and slightly tangy cookie dates back to the 1960s. Luckily, today's cookie presses are much easier to use than the old hand-crank variety, so baking dozens of pretty little cookies is a snap.

8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
3 ounces cream cheese (Jennifer uses Philadelphia brand), softened at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg yolk
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
11¼ ounces (2½ cups) all-purpose flour, sifted
1 egg white, lightly beaten
Colored sugars or other decorations for sprinkling (optional)

Heat the oven to 375°F. With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, beat the butter, cream cheese, and sugar in a large bowl on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 4 minutes. Add the egg yolk and vanilla and beat again until blended. Add the flour and mix on low speed until blended.

Fit a cookie press with a die plate. Scoop up about a quarter of the dough and, using a small amount of flour if needed, shape the dough into a log just narrower than the barrel of the cookie press. Slide the log into the cookie press and spritz the cookies directly onto ungreased baking sheets about 1 inch apart. Brush the tops with the beaten egg white and sprinkle with colored sugar if using. Repeat with the remaining dough.

Bake until the cookies are just golden around the edges, 10 to 12 minutes (it's best to bake one sheet at a time). Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet on a rack for 5 minutes before transferring them to a rack to cool completely. Be sure the baking sheet is cool before spritzing more cookies.

Store at room temperature or freeze in an airtight container, separating the cookie layers with waxed paper.



Denise Pierce's Macadamia Lace Cookies

Yields about 52 3-inch cookies.

The combination of rich macadamia nuts and browned butter gives these pretty, delicate cookies an intense flavor. Denise likes to use vanilla bean paste (a combination of vanilla extract and vanilla seeds; see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88), but vanilla extract works well, too.

4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, cut into 5 pieces
4½ ounces (1 cup) finely chopped lightly salted macadamia nuts
1 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste or pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon table salt

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two or three large baking sheets with nonstick baking liners or parchment.

In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter and then continue cooking it just until the butter solids at the bottom of the pan turn deep golden brown (not black), 5 to 7 minutes. Watch the butter carefully. Immediately remove the pan from the heat and pour the butter into a small bowl, scraping the pan to get all the butter. Let cool slightly, about 5 minutes.

Combine the chopped nuts, sugar, egg, vanilla, and salt in a medium bowl. Stir until blended. Slowly add the

browned butter and continue stirring until blended.

Drop the batter by slightly heaping teaspoonfuls about 3 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets. Bake until the cookies are golden brown, 6 to 8 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheets on racks for 5 minutes before transferring them to racks to cool completely. Repeat with the remaining batter after the sheets have cooled.

Store at room temperature or freeze in an airtight container, separating the cookie layers with waxed paper.





Maxine Henderson's Raspberry Diamonds

Yields about 6 dozen cookies.

One of the prettiest cookies in the bunch, Maxine's clever imitation of a raspberry Danish is tender and buttery. For best results, store the cookies without the glaze. (After a day, the glaze will begin to absorb the raspberry color.)

FOR THE COOKIES:

11¼ ounces (2½ cups) all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
⅛ teaspoon table salt
8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
½ cup granulated sugar
2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
1 large egg, at room temperature
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon pure almond extract
6 tablespoons raspberry jam
(Maxine prefers seedless)

FOR THE ALMOND GLAZE:

1 cup sifted confectioners' sugar
Pinch table salt

1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon water
¼ teaspoon pure almond extract

Make the cookies: In a medium bowl, whisk the flour with the cream of tartar and salt until well blended. With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, beat the butter, sugar, and confectioners' sugar in a large bowl on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 4 minutes, scraping the bowl as needed. Add the egg, vanilla extract, and almond extract and beat until blended. Add the flour mixture and mix on low speed until just blended.

On a lightly floured surface, divide the dough into six equal pieces. If the dough is very soft, wrap each portion in plastic and refrigerate until firmer, about 1 hour.

Heat the oven to 350°F and have ready two large ungreased baking sheets (or line them with nonstick baking liners). If the

dough is in the refrigerator, remove it and unwrap it. Using your hands or a rolling pin (or both), shape each piece into a flat 12x1½-inch strip about ¼ inch thick, dusting with flour if needed. Transfer the strips to the prepared baking sheets, spacing them about 3 inches apart.

Using the butt end of a knife handle dipped lightly in flour, make an indentation down the middle of each strip (this will widen the strip to about 1¾ inches and make a depression about halfway down into the strip). Spread 1 tablespoon of the jam evenly down the indentation of each strip.

Bake until the cookie strips are lightly browned on the bottom and edges, about 20 minutes. Let the strips cool on the sheets on racks for 5 minutes before carefully transferring them to racks to cool completely (a long offset metal spatula is good for this). Before glazing, set the

rack over a baking sheet or a sheet of waxed paper. If you plan to freeze these cookies, do it before glazing.

Glaze the cookies: In a small bowl, mix the confectioners' sugar with the salt, water, and almond extract. The glaze should be thick enough to hold its shape when drizzled; add more confectioners' sugar or water if needed. Using the tines of a fork, drizzle the glaze over the tops of the cooled cookie strips. (Or transfer the glaze to a sturdy zip-top plastic bag, snip off a tiny bit of one corner of the bag and drizzle.) Leave the cookies on the rack until the glaze is set, about 30 minutes, and transfer to a cutting board. With a serrated knife, cut each bar on the diagonal into 1-inch-thick diamond shapes.

Store at room temperature or freeze (unglazed) in an airtight container, separating the cookie layers with waxed paper.

Susan Betz's Triple-Orange Pecan Biscotti

Yields about 60 biscotti.

Susan prefers home-baked biscotti to many of the supersized "jaw-breakers" in stores. She developed this orange-infused version of the classic, and she thinks it's the perfect holiday cookie because of its great keeping and shipping qualities. These twice-baked Italian cookies "smell divine and are delicious eaten by themselves or dunked into hot tea or coffee," she says. We agree.

12 ounces (2½ cups) all-purpose flour
1½ cups granulated sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
¾ teaspoon table salt
Finely grated zest of 2 oranges (to yield a scant ¼ cup lightly packed)
4½ ounces (1 cup) coarsely chopped pecans
3 large eggs, at room temperature
5 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons fresh orange juice
1 tablespoon orange liqueur, such as Grand Marnier

Position oven racks in the middle and top of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment.

In a large bowl, whisk the flour with the sugar, baking powder, and salt to combine. Put a bit of the flour mixture in a small bowl, add the orange zest, and rub the zest into the flour to keep it from clumping. Stir the coated zest and the pecans into the rest of the flour mixture.

In a small bowl, whisk the eggs with the olive oil, orange juice, and liqueur until well blended. Pour into the center of the flour mixture. Stir with a wooden spoon until the dough is blended. The dough will be very sticky.

Dump the dough onto a heavily floured work surface and divide into six equal portions. Roll each portion into a log that's 12 inches long, dusting with flour along the way to keep the dough from sticking. Set the logs about 3 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets and then press gently to flatten each log so that it's 1½ to 2 inches wide.

Bake until the logs are golden and the tops are fairly firm near the center, 22 to 25 minutes, rotating the sheets and switching their positions after 10 minutes to ensure even baking. Set the sheets on racks until the logs are cool enough to handle, 20 to 30 minutes. Leave the oven set to 350°F.

Transfer the logs to a cutting board and, using a serrated knife, saw them on a sharp diagonal into slices ½ inch thick. Arrange the slices on the baking sheets, laying them flat with a cut side down. Return the baking sheets to the oven and bake the biscotti for about 6 minutes. Turn the biscotti over, rotate the baking sheets and switch their positions, and bake until the biscotti are golden, another 8 to 10 minutes.

Let cool on the sheets on racks for 5 minutes before transferring them to racks to cool completely (the biscotti won't get crisp until then).

Store at room temperature or freeze in an airtight container, separating the cookie layers with waxed paper.

Candice Clauss's Potato-Chip Cookies

Yields about 30 cookies.

Potato chips in a cookie? You bet. Candice's version of her grandmother's recipe adds a new and delicious crunch to the traditional pecan sandie, resulting in a buttery cookie with a light and flaky texture. Candice advises not to refrigerate or freeze the unbaked dough, as the potato chips will become soggy.

8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for shaping
½ cup granulated sugar; more for shaping
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
8 ounces (scant 2 cups) all-purpose flour
2 ounces (½ cup) finely chopped pecans
½ cup finely crushed potato chips

Position oven racks in the middle and top of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment.

With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, beat the butter and sugar on medium speed in

a large bowl until creamy and well blended, about 4 minutes, scraping the bowl as needed. Add the vanilla and beat again until blended. Add the flour, pecans, and potato chips and mix on low speed until just blended.

Shape heaping teaspoons of dough into 1-inch balls. Arrange the balls about 2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets. Put some sugar in a shallow bowl. Lightly grease the bottom of a glass or measuring cup with soft butter. Dip the glass into the sugar and press the glass down on a dough ball until it's about ¼ inch thick. Repeat dipping and pressing with the remaining balls.

Bake until the cookies look dry on top and the edges are light golden, 10 to 12 minutes, rotating and swapping the positions of the sheets for even baking. Let the cookies cool on the sheets on racks for 5 minutes before transferring them to racks to cool completely.

Store at room temperature or freeze in an airtight container, separating the cookie layers with waxed paper.





Judi Terrell Linden's Orange Chocolate-Chip Cookies

Yields about 32 2½-inch cookies.

Because these cakey cookies are enriched with whole-milk ricotta and scented with grated orange zest, Judi has nicknamed them "cannoli" cookies.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
(Judi uses Pillsbury)
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
at room temperature
¼ cup whole-milk ricotta, at room
temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 large egg, at room temperature
4½ ounces (¾ cup) chocolate chips

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour with the baking soda and salt until well blended.

With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, beat the butter and ricotta on medium-high speed until

light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add the sugar, orange zest, and vanilla; beat until blended, about 3 minutes. Scrape the bowl. On medium speed, add the egg and beat until blended. Add the flour mixture and mix on low speed until almost completely blended. Pour in the chocolate chips and continue mixing until just incorporated. Scrape the dough down from the sides of the bowl, cover with plastic, and refrigerate until slightly firmer, about half an hour.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line large baking sheets with nonstick baking liners or parchment. Drop the batter by rounded tablespoons about 2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets. Bake until the cookies are light golden, about 15 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheets on racks for 5 minutes before transferring them to racks to cool completely.

Store at room temperature or freeze in an airtight container, separating the cookie layers with waxed paper.

Camilla Leonard's Brownie Cream Cheese Bites

Yields 5 dozen bites.

Camilla likes to jazz up her holiday cookie trays with a good dose of chocolate. Her mini cupcakes add a delicious burst of fudgy flavor and a playful element to the usual cookie assortment.

FOR THE BROWNIES:

4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, cut
into 3 pieces
4 ounces unsweetened chocolate,
coarsely chopped
4 large eggs, at room temperature
¼ teaspoon table salt
2 cups granulated sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
5¾ ounces (1¼ cups) all-purpose flour

FOR THE CREAM CHEESE TOPPING:

6 ounces cream cheese, softened at
room temperature
3 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 large egg yolk, at room temperature
½ cup semisweet mini chocolate chips

Heat the oven to 350°F and line three one-dozen capacity (five if you have them) mini muffin tins with foil or paper liners.

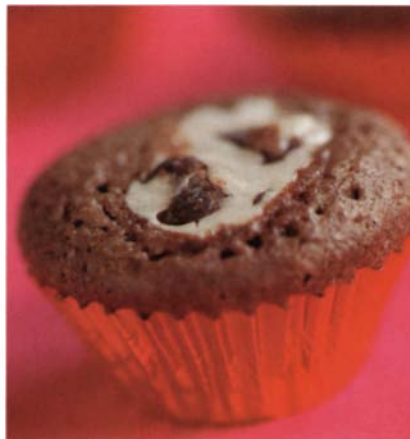
Make the brownie batter: Combine the butter and chocolate in a small heatproof bowl. Set the bowl over

simmering water or in a microwave and heat, stirring frequently with a rubber spatula, until the butter and chocolate are melted and smooth. Set aside.

With a stand mixer (use the whisk attachment) or a hand mixer, beat the eggs and salt in a large bowl on medium speed until very foamy, about 2 minutes. Continue beating while gradually adding the sugar. Beat until thick and pale, about 3 minutes. With a large rubber spatula, scrape the chocolate mixture into the eggs, add the vanilla, and fold until the two mixtures are just barely incorporated. Add the flour and continue folding until just incorporated. Scrape the batter into a 1-gallon heavy-duty zip-top bag. Squeeze out as much air as possible and seal.

Make the cream cheese topping: In a medium bowl, beat the cream cheese and sugar with a wooden spoon until smooth and creamy. Add the egg yolk and mix until blended. Pour in the chips and mix until blended. Scrape into a 1-quart zip-top bag. Squeeze out as much air as possible and seal.

Assemble and bake: Snip off ½ inch from one corner of each bag. Fill each lined muffin cup about two-thirds full with the brownie batter and then top



with about 1 teaspoon of the cream cheese mixture.

Bake the three trays in the center of the oven until the brownies are puffed and a pick inserted in the brownie comes out just barely clean, about 20 minutes. Let the brownies cool in the trays on racks for 5 minutes before carefully lifting the liners out of the tins and transferring them to racks to cool completely. Be sure the tins are completely cool before lining and filling them with the remaining batters.

Store at room temperature or freeze in an airtight container, separating the layers with waxed paper.



Katherine Gibson's Ginger Bars

Yields 32 3x2-inch bars.

Katherine loves these spicy ginger bars because they're a cross between a gooey blondie and classic gingerbread. The bars' moist, soft texture also makes them great keepers and shippers.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour (Katherine uses King Arthur)
1 teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon table salt
2½ teaspoons ground ginger
1¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground cloves
6½ ounces (13 tablespoons) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
1½ cups granulated sugar
2 tablespoons plus 1½ teaspoons molasses
4½ teaspoons honey
2 extra-large eggs
Confectioners' sugar for sprinkling

Heat the oven to 350°F and lightly grease a 13x9-inch baking pan. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour with the baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves until blended.

With a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand mixer, beat the butter, sugar, molasses, and honey until creamy and well blended, about 4 minutes. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating after each addition until blended. Add the flour mixture and mix on low speed until just blended.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread evenly. Bake until the edges just begin to pull away from the sides of the pan and a pick inserted in the center comes out almost clean, 23 to 25 minutes. Set the pan on a rack to cool completely. Cut into bars, squares, or triangles. Sift a light coating of confectioners' sugar over the cookies just before serving.

Store at room temperature or freeze in an airtight container, separating the layers with waxed paper.



Renée Henry's Apricot Coconut Bars

Yields 16 2-inch bars.

Since she's been the designated Christmas baker of her family for 20 years, Renée likes to include a new cookie in her repertoire each year. This past year, inspired by her family's love of buttery tarts, she concocted these Apricot Coconut Bars. Renée says, "The combination of sweet, tangy apricots mixed with coconut on a sweetened crust is borderline addictive."

FOR THE CRUST:

5 ounces (1 cup plus 2 tablespoons) all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
Pinch table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces

FOR THE TOPPING:

½ cup packed light brown sugar
1 extra-large egg
2 tablespoons apricot jam
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon pure almond extract
1 cup firmly packed diced dried apricots (about 6 ounces)
¼ cup sweetened shredded coconut

Make the crust: Position an oven rack in the bottom third of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly

grease an 8-inch-square baking pan and line the bottom with parchment. Combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor. Add the butter pieces and pulse until the mixture resembles moist pebbles. Dump the dough into the prepared pan and press down to form an even layer. Bake until the crust is lightly golden, about 30 minutes. Transfer the pan to a rack and leave the oven set to 350°F.

Make the topping: While the crust is baking, combine the brown sugar, egg, apricot jam, flour, baking powder, salt, and almond extract in a medium bowl. Whisk until blended. Stir in the apricots and coconut. When the crust is baked, scrape the topping into the pan and spread evenly. Continue baking until the topping is browned around the edges and a pick inserted in the center comes out a bit sticky, about 20 minutes. Set the pan on a rack to cool completely before inverting onto a cutting board. Using a warm, thin-bladed knife, trim off the edges and cut into bars.

Store at room temperature or freeze in an airtight container, separating the layers with waxed paper. ♦

Apple Pie with Poached Dried Cherries



Brown Sugar & Sour Cream




make & freeze Holiday

BY KATHLEEN STEWART

For many years around the holidays, customers at our bakery would plead with us to make a pie that they could take home and bake; they'd get the taste (and all those great aromas) of a home-baked pie without having to actually make it. I began testing and soon came up with methods for freezing our most popular pies—unbaked—without compromising their quality. As a result, when *Fine Cooking* called to see if I had a solution for time-pressed readers who really enjoy the process of making a pie—but who would rather not have to do it on the same day as all that other holiday cooking, I had some great

tips to offer, not to mention some delicious recipes, too.

The three desserts you see on these pages—Apple Pie with Poached Dried Cherries, Brown Sugar & Sour Cream Pumpkin Pie, and Pear-Cranberry Linzer Tart—aren't difficult to prepare. Rather, they just require a couple of tricks to smooth the transfer into the freezer and then eventually into the oven (see the tips on p. 58). And their convenience is hard to beat: Prepare these pies up to six weeks before the holidays, freeze them, and then bake them on the big day. The crusts will be tender and flaky, not soggy, the fillings will be full of



Pumpkin Pie



Pear-Cranberry Linzer Tart

Pies

to bake & serve when you want

flavor—and your holiday entertaining will be that much easier.

Freeze fruit pies fully assembled, custard pies in two parts

How I choose to freeze a pie or tart depends on whether the pie is fruit- or custard-filled. Holiday fruit pies are more forgiving than custard pies, because firm-textured fruits like apples and pears retain a little of their own moisture while they bake, preventing that sogginess that can afflict some fruit pastries (berries come to mind) and custard pies. I assemble these fruit pies completely, freeze them immediately, and then, when

Tip: If you want to skip the freezer and go straight to the oven, just watch the clock.

While these pies are versatile enough to withstand the stress of freezing, you can also bake them immediately after assembling them. Bake the pies according to the recipes' instructions, but start checking for doneness about half an hour before the indicated times. On average, these desserts should take about 15 minutes less time to bake than the frozen ones.

I'm ready to bake, I transfer them straight from the freezer to a hot oven. By not defrosting them first, I'm further protecting them against sogginess because the crust starts to bake and firm up before the fruit begins to give off juices. These frozen pies take a little more time to bake than a freshly assembled one, but the payoff is worth it.

I freeze custard pies in a "kit" made up of the filling and the pie shell. I find that keeping the custard and the pie shell separate is the best protection against sogginess. The day before I plan to bake the pumpkin pie, I pull the custard from the freezer; it needs to thaw in the refrigerator, not at room temperature. The next day, I blind bake the pie shell—that is, I bake it without the filling to let the pastry get golden brown and slightly crisp—and then I add the filling and finish baking. (For more tips, see below.) By handling the two elements this way, I keep the custard from weeping.



Tips for freezing...

...the fruit pie and tart:

FREEZE IMMEDIATELY AFTER ASSEMBLING. It's important to freeze the fruit pies as soon as you finish preparing them. Once fruit is mixed with sugar, it begins to exude moisture. This can cause ice crystals to form during freezing, which would melt and dampen the crust during baking.

WRAP THE PIES TIGHTLY IN SEVERAL LAYERS OF PLASTIC AND LABEL THEM. Wrapping well will keep out moisture and prevent ice crystals from forming. (If freezing for longer than a week, add an outer layer of foil as well.) To remember where to find the baking instructions for the pies, label the pie with the issue and page number from *Fine Cooking's Holiday Baking*—and the date, too.

...the pumpkin pie:

IMMEDIATELY FREEZE THE CUSTARD TO PREVENT OFF FLAVORS. Put the finished custard mixture in a clean, airtight container and put it in the coldest part of your freezer. If allowed to sit even overnight in the refrigerator, the pumpkin can start to ferment, thickening the custard and eventually giving it a sour flavor.

IMMEDIATELY FREEZE THE PIE SHELL. Freezing pastry quickly prevents the butter from melting, which will mean a flaky, tender texture when the shell is baked.

Tips for baking...

...the fruit pie and tart:

GO DIRECTLY FROM FREEZER TO OVEN. Don't defrost the pie first. Unwrap it and put it in the heated oven so that the crust begins to bake before the fruit has a chance to start thawing.

...for both:

USE A HEATED BAKING SHEET OR PIZZA STONE FOR THE CRISPEST CRUST. To cook the frozen pies evenly, I recommend baking them on the bottom rack of the oven on a heated baking sheet. This setup mimics the strong bottom heat of my bakery's oven. Using a pizza or bread stone is even better (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88). A stone does a wonderful job of radiating heat and crisping the pie shell to a beautiful golden brown.

...the pumpkin pie:

DEFROST THE CUSTARD A DAY AHEAD. I thaw the pumpkin custard in the refrigerator overnight and then thoroughly whisk it to make it smooth and incorporate any icy bits that might be floating in the liquid.

BLIND BAKE THE SHELL. For a crisp crust, bake the shell first (see the recipe directions) and then fill it with the pumpkin custard and finish baking.

make & freeze

Apple Pie with Poached Dried Cherries

Yields one 9-inch pie; serves eight.

I always use dried tart cherries rather than sweet ones. Tart cherries are made from sour cherries, which are “true” pie cherries, and they definitely give the pie a more complex flavor. (For sources, see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88.)

FOR THE PIE DOUGH:

10 ounces (2 ¼ cups)
all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon table salt
½ teaspoon granulated sugar
7 ounces (14 tablespoons)
cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
1 ½ ounces (3 tablespoons)
cold vegetable shortening, cut into ½-inch pieces
3 tablespoons ice-cold water

FOR THE POACHED CHERRIES:

½ cup water
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 cup (about 6 ounces) dried tart cherries

FOR THE APPLE-CHERRY FILLING:

2 ½ to 3 pounds (about 7) firm, tart apples (like Cortland, Jonagold, or Sierra Gold), peeled, cored, and cut into ½-inch slices (about 7 cups)
7 to 8 tablespoons granulated sugar
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

TO FINISH:

1 egg yolk, beaten
¼ cup heavy cream or milk

Make the pie dough: Whisk the flour, salt, and sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer or in a mixing bowl. In the stand mixer (use the paddle attachment and gradually increase from low to medium speed) or in the bowl by hand with a pastry blender, cut the butter into the flour until the butter starts breaking into smaller pieces. Cut in the shortening until the biggest pieces of

both fats are the size of peas. With the mixer running, sprinkle in the water and mix until the dough just holds together. There should be some visible bits of butter. Cut the dough in half (each piece should be about 9 ½ ounces), pat each half into a flat disk, wrap tightly in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Poach the cherries: Combine the water and sugar in a small saucepan, bring to a boil, add the dried cherries, and simmer for 3 minutes. Drain the cherries and let cool before using. (Save the poaching liquid to drizzle on ice cream.)

Assemble the pie: Take both disks of dough from the refrigerator and let them warm up until pliable, about 15 minutes. Unwrap the dough and set it on a lightly floured work surface. With as few passes of the rolling pin as possible, roll each disk into an 11- to 12-inch round about ⅛ inch thick. After every few passes of the rolling pin, run a bench scraper under the dough to be sure it isn't sticking (to prevent tearing), scatter a little more flour under it, and continue rolling. Drape one round into a 9-inch pie pan, gently fitting it to the contours of the pan. Let the dough rest for 1 to 2 minutes (this will help keep the crust from shrinking during baking) and then trim the edge, leaving about ½ inch hanging over the rim of the pan.

Toss the apples with the sugar, flour, cinnamon, and poached cherries. Pour the fruit into the pie shell and press down with your palms to arrange it evenly. (This will keep the apples from poking holes in the top crust.)

Drape the top crust over the pie. Trim the edge of the top

crust to the same size as the bottom. Fold both the trimmed edges together and under so they rest on the rim of the pie pan and form a tall edge. Crimp the edge decoratively but be sure the bottom and top crusts are sealed at the edges. Vent the top by poking the tip of a paring knife through it in a few places. (It's important to vent well or the fruit can explode during baking.) You can make attractive designs by tracing a pattern on top and then poking lots of little holes with the tip of a knife. Immediately wrap the pie tightly in plastic, making sure there are no gaps to allow air or moisture inside. Store in the coldest part of the freezer (generally the top) until ready to bake.



bake & serve

Position an oven rack on the bottom rung. Line a heavy rimmed baking sheet with foil and set it on the rack. Heat the oven to 350°F.

In a small bowl, whisk the egg yolk with the milk or cream. Take the pie from the freezer, unwrap it, and brush the top with the egg glaze (you won't need to use all of it). Repierce the steam vents if they get clogged with the glaze. Bake on the heated baking sheet until the pastry is a deep golden and the juices are bubbling, about 1 ¾ hours. If the edges start to get too dark, loosely drape foil around the sides or cover the edges with a pie guard (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88). Let cool on a rack to room temperature and then serve.

make & freeze

Brown Sugar & Sour Cream Pumpkin Pie

Yields one 9-inch pie; serves eight to twelve.

At the bakery, we use fresh organic sugar pumpkins that we bake, purée, and freeze (fresh pumpkin ferments quickly), but for convenience, we developed this recipe with canned pumpkin. For tips on how to cut fat into flour when making pastry, see Food Science, p. 18.

FOR THE PIE DOUGH:

5 ounces (1 cup plus 2 tablespoons) all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon granulated sugar
3½ ounces (7 tablespoons) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
¾ ounce (1 ½ tablespoons) cold vegetable shortening, cut into ½-inch pieces
1 ½ tablespoons ice-cold water

FOR THE PUMPKIN FILLING:

15-ounce can (about 1¾ cups) pure solid-pack pumpkin (not pumpkin pie filling)
½ cup packed light brown sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground ginger
Pinch ground cloves
Pinch table salt
Pinch ground white pepper
1 tablespoon brandy
2 large eggs plus 2 egg yolks
½ cup half-and-half
¼ cup sour cream

FOR THE BROWN SUGAR WHIPPED CREAM:

¾ cup whipping cream
¼ cup sour cream
2 tablespoons light brown sugar

Make the pie dough: Whisk the flour, salt, and sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer or in a mixing bowl. In the stand mixer (use the paddle attachment and gradually increase from low to medium speed) or in the bowl by hand with a pastry blender, cut the butter into the flour until the butter starts breaking into smaller pieces. Cut in the shortening until the biggest pieces of

both fats are the size of peas.

With the mixer running, sprinkle in the water and mix until the dough just holds together. There should be some visible bits of butter. Pat the dough into a flat disk, wrap tightly in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Take the dough from the refrigerator and let it warm up until pliable, about 15 minutes. Unwrap the dough and set it on a lightly floured work surface. With as few passes of the rolling pin as possible, roll the disk into an 11- to 12-inch round about ⅛ inch thick. After every few passes of the rolling pin, run a bench scraper under the dough to be sure it isn't sticking (to prevent tearing), scatter a little more flour under it, and continue rolling. Drape the dough into a 9-inch pie pan, gently fitting it to the contours of the pan. Let the dough rest for 1 to 2 minutes (this will help keep the crust from shrinking during baking) and then trim the edge, leaving about ½ inch hanging over the rim of the pan. Tuck the overhang under to make a tall edge that rests on the rim of the pan. Crimp the edge decoratively. Wrap well in plastic and store in the coldest part of the freezer (generally the top).

Make the pumpkin filling: Put the pumpkin purée in a medium bowl. Whisk in the brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, salt, white pepper, and brandy. Whisk in the eggs and egg yolks. In a small bowl, whisk the half-and-half with the sour cream until very smooth, add this to the pumpkin mixture, and whisk well. Immediately transfer to a clean, airtight container (you should have about 4 cups). Freeze in the coldest part of the freezer (generally the top) until the day before you plan to bake.



bake & serve

The day before baking, move the custard from the freezer to the refrigerator to thaw overnight.

The next day, position an oven rack on the bottom rung. Line a heavy rimmed baking sheet with foil and set it on the rack. Heat the oven to 350°F. Take the pie shell from the freezer and the custard from the refrigerator. Line the shell with parchment, fill with dried beans or pie weights, and bake on the heated baking sheet until golden brown, about 1 hour.

Meanwhile, empty the custard into a bowl. It will probably still be partially frozen. Use a whisk to break up the custard and then whisk occasionally to finish thawing while the shell bakes.

Carefully remove the parchment and weights from the shell. Turn the oven down to 325°F. Whisk the custard so that no icy bits remain and pour it into the shell. Bake the pie on the baking sheet until the custard is just set but still slightly jiggly in the center, 45 to 50 minutes. If the edges start to get too dark, loosely drape foil around the sides or cover the edges with a pie guard (see Where to Buy It, p. 88). Let cool completely a rack.

Make the whipped cream and serve:

Combine the whipping cream and sour cream in a medium bowl (preferably a chilled metal bowl). Whip on high speed with a hand mixer until it starts to thicken. Add the brown sugar and continue to whip until the cream holds soft peaks. Serve the pie with a couple of dollops of the whipped cream.



make & freeze

Pear-Cranberry Linzer Tart

Yields one 9-inch tart; serves eight.

Linzer dough is traditionally made with almonds, but the walnuts here are sublime with the fruit. It's important to mix this dough very well and chill it thoroughly; it's more like a cookie dough than a pastry dough. The cooked egg yolks give the dough a cakey quality that's unequalled by any substitute. The raw yolks bind the dough and add extra richness.

FOR THE DOUGH:

4 ounces (1 cup) walnuts, lightly toasted
½ cup granulated sugar
8 ounces (1¾ cups) all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
½ teaspoon table salt
⅛ teaspoon ground cloves
2 hard-cooked egg yolks, crumbled
8 ounces (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
2 raw egg yolks
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

FOR THE FILLING:

2 pounds ripe pears (preferably Comice or Bosc), peeled, cored, and cut into ⅓-inch slices (about 4 cups)
6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries, picked through and rinsed
½ cup granulated sugar

TO FINISH:

1 egg yolk
¼ cup heavy cream or whole milk

Make the dough: In a food processor, grind the walnuts with the sugar to a sandy texture. Add the flour, cinnamon, lemon zest, salt, cloves, and crumbled hard-cooked egg yolks. Pulse briefly to combine. Add the butter and pulse until the dough starts to come together and looks clumpy. Add the raw yolks and vanilla and pulse until well combined. The dough will be sticky and moist, more like a

cookie dough than a pastry dough. Cut the dough in half (each piece should be about 12¾ ounces), set each half on a large piece of plastic, and shape each into a flat disk, using the plastic to help you flatten. Wrap each disk in its plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Assemble the tart: On a floured work surface, roll each disk of dough into an 11-inch round about ¼ inch thick. Put one round on a plate and refrigerate, uncovered. Fit the other round into a 9-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom. Fold the excess dough into the sides of the pan and press to get an edge flush with the top of the pan, about ⅓ inch thick. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons of the flour on the bottom of the tart and spread to evenly cover. Toss the pears and cranberries with the remaining ¼ cup flour. Arrange the fruit in the tart shell so that the pears lie as flat as possible and there are some berries showing on top.

Scrape any remaining flour over the fruit and sprinkle with the sugar. Take the other piece of dough from the refrigerator and cut it into eight 1-inch-wide strips. (I use a ruler and a ravioli cutter or a pastry cutter to get beautiful zigzag-edged strips.) Arrange four strips, evenly spaced, over the top of the tart. Then, on a sharp diagonal to the first four, set the other four strips on top so that the overlapping layers make diamond-shaped windows. Trim the ends of the strips and press them into the edges of the tart, as shown at right. Wrap the tart tightly in plastic. Store in the coldest part of your freezer (generally the top) until ready to bake.

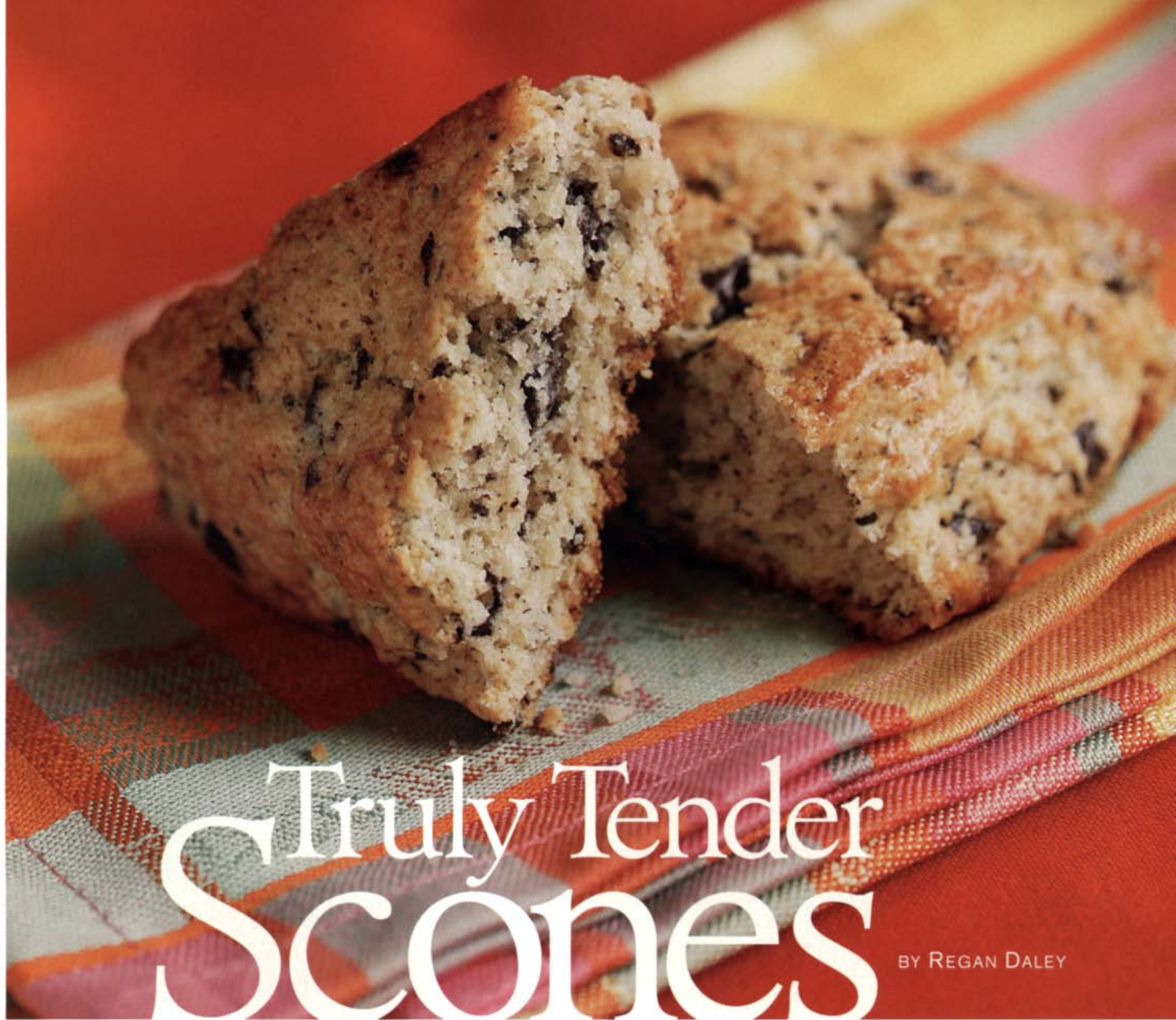


bake & serve

Position an oven rack on the bottom rung. Line a heavy rimmed baking sheet with foil and set it on the rack. Heat the oven to 350°F.

Whisk the egg yolk with the cream or milk. Take the tart from the freezer, unwrap it, and brush the top strips with the egg glaze. Bake on the baking sheet until the pastry is golden brown, 1 ¼ to 1 ½ hours. Let cool on a rack for 1 hour and serve slightly warm.

Kathleen Stewart runs the Downtown Bakery in Healdsburg, California. ♦



Truly Tender Scones

BY REGAN DALEY

While I'll readily confess to being addicted to scones, I can maintain some dignity. I don't love just any old scone. What I adore is the true classic, made tender and rich with cream and butter and eggs.

A good scone is a beautiful balance of opposites: rich but light, tender but sturdy, satisfyingly sweet but not overly so. The Classic Cream Scone at far right is delicious with the traditional jam and cream accompaniments, but the variations I've included can hold their own with nothing more than a cup of tea or coffee.

A forgiving dough that's quick to make. Sadly, there are criminally substandard pastries out there being passed off as scones. A shame, really, when you consider how very simple it is to make terrific ones. A batch can be ready for the oven in less than ten minutes, even less if you measure the ingredients ahead—just in time for that first cup of morning coffee.

It's a breeze to master the technique for scone dough: the less you work it, the more tender the scones will be. That said, the following recipes are forgiving, so even novice bakers can get used to the feel of the dough without sacrificing tenderness. The trick is to mix as little yet as thoroughly as you can; your hands are wonderful for this, as they can discern pockets of dry or wet better than any tool. Imagine there's a timer on—be quick and light. If I'm adding chopped nuts, fruits, chocolate, or herbs, I like to mix them into the dry ingredients to ensure even distribution.

While ripe for variety, scones, I find, come out best with no more than two flavors added to the dough; more than that compromises their light texture and pure flavor. And though all the recipes that follow are quite at home at teatime, don't be surprised if, like me, you find yourself covered in crumbs long before the kettle boils.

Making these scones couldn't be easier—the less you work them, the more tender they'll be

Chocolate Chunk Scones

Yields 8 large scones.

Choose a good quality bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate (see Baking with Chocolate in *Where to Buy It*, p. 88). The better the chocolate, the better the scones will taste.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
⅓ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
½ teaspoon table salt
5½ ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped (to yield 1 cup)
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes
¾ cup heavy cream
2 large egg yolks, lightly beaten

FOR FINISHING:

1 large egg lightly beaten with
1 tablespoon milk for glazing
1 to 1½ teaspoons granulated sugar

Position an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Line a heavy baking sheet with parchment. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add the chopped chocolate, tossing until the pieces are evenly distributed and coated with flour. Cut in the butter with a pastry blender or two table knives until the largest pieces of butter are about the size of peas.

In a small bowl, stir the cream and egg yolks just to blend. Add this all at once to the flour mixture. Stir with a fork to begin combining the wet and dry ingredients and then use your hands to gently knead the mixture together until all the dry ingredients are absorbed into the dough and it can be gathered into a moist, shaggy ball. Don't overknead: This dough is sticky but benefits from minimal handling. Set the rough ball in the center of the prepared baking sheet and pat it gently into a round about 1 inch thick and 7 inches in diameter. Don't be tempted to make the round any flatter.

With a sharp knife or a pastry scraper, cut the round into eight wedges; separate the wedges. Brush the scones with the egg-milk glaze (you won't need to use all of it) and sprinkle with the sugar. Bake until the scones are deep golden and a toothpick inserted into the center of a wedge comes out clean, 18 to 22 minutes. Slide the parchment onto a rack and let the scones cool for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.



Classic Cream Scones

Yields 8 large scones.

These plump, moist scones are rich and subtly sweet.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
⅓ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
½ teaspoon table salt
2¾ ounces (½ cup) dried currants (optional)
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes
¾ cup heavy cream
2 large egg yolks, lightly beaten

FOR FINISHING:

1 large egg lightly beaten with
1 tablespoon milk for glazing
1 to 1½ teaspoons granulated sugar

Position an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Line a heavy baking sheet with parchment. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add the currants, if using, tossing until evenly distributed and coated with flour. Cut in the butter with a pastry blender or two table knives until the largest pieces of butter are about the size of peas.

In a small bowl, stir the cream and egg yolks just to blend. Add this all at once to the flour mixture. Stir with a fork to begin combining the wet and dry ingredients and then use your hands to gently knead the mixture together until all

the dry ingredients are absorbed into the dough and it can be gathered into a moist, shaggy ball. Don't overknead: This dough is sticky but benefits from minimal handling. Set the rough ball in the center of the prepared baking sheet and pat it gently into a round about 1 inch thick and 7 inches in diameter. Don't be tempted to make the round any flatter.

With a sharp knife or a pastry scraper, cut the round into eight wedges; separate the wedges. Brush the scones with the egg-milk glaze (you won't need to use all of it) and sprinkle with the sugar. Bake until the scones are deep golden and a toothpick inserted into the center of a wedge comes out clean, 18 to 22 minutes. Slide the parchment onto a rack and let the scones cool for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

FLAVOR VARIATION

CHERRY-VANILLA SCONES

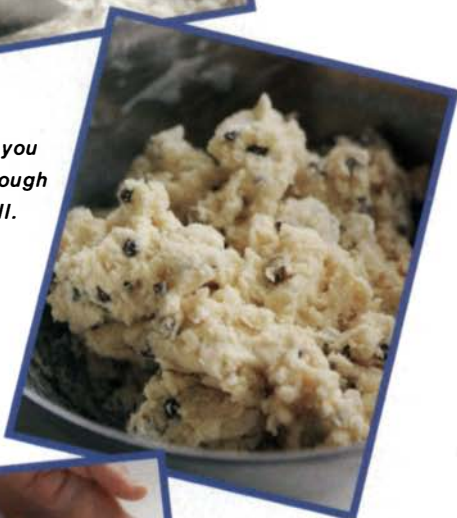
Replace the currants with 6 ounces (1 cup) dried cherries, coarsely chopped. Add the seeds scraped from 1 large vanilla bean (or add 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract) to the cream and egg yolks before combining with the dry ingredients.

Mixing and shaping tips



Cut the butter into the flour until the largest chunks are the size of peas. Two table knives can stand in for a pastry cutter.

Knead just until you can gather the dough into a shaggy ball.



Pat the shaggy ball into a manageable round.

Section the round into eighths with a dough scraper or a knife.



Double Ginger Scones

Yields 8 large scones.

See *Where to Buy It*, p. 88, for sources for crystallized ginger.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
⅓ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
½ teaspoon table salt
½ teaspoon ground ginger
4 ounces (¾ cup) medium-finely chopped crystallized ginger
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes
¾ cup heavy cream
2 large egg yolks, lightly beaten

FOR FINISHING:

1 large egg lightly beaten with 1 tablespoon milk for glazing
1 to 1½ teaspoons granulated sugar

Position an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Line a heavy baking sheet with parchment. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and ground ginger. Add the crystallized ginger, tossing until the pieces are evenly distributed and coated with flour. Cut in the butter with a pastry blender or two table knives until the largest pieces of butter are about the size of peas.

In a small bowl, stir the cream and egg yolks just to blend. Add this all at once to the flour mixture. Stir with a fork to begin combining the wet and dry ingredients and then use your hands to gently knead the mixture together until all the dry ingredients are absorbed into the dough and it can be gathered into a moist, shaggy ball. Don't overknead: This dough is sticky but benefits from minimal handling. Set the rough ball in the center of the prepared baking sheet and pat it gently into a round about 1 inch thick and 7 inches in diameter. Don't be tempted to make the round any flatter.

With a sharp knife or a pastry scraper, cut the round into eight wedges; separate the wedges. Brush the scones with the egg-milk glaze (you won't need to use all of it) and sprinkle with the sugar. Bake until the scones are deep golden and a toothpick inserted into the center of a wedge comes out clean, 18 to 22 minutes. Slide the parchment onto a rack and let the scones cool for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

Savory Rosemary Scones

Yields 8 scones.

Similar to a flavored biscuit, but richer and more tender, these savory scones are the perfect accompaniment to a hearty soup or stew, an assortment of cheese and cold meats, or a brunch or supper.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon table salt
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh rosemary
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup heavy cream
2 large egg yolks, lightly beaten

FOR FINISHING:

1 large egg lightly beaten with
1 tablespoon milk for glazing
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt or sea salt

Position an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Line a heavy baking sheet with parchment. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and chopped rosemary. Cut in the butter with a pastry blender or two table knives until the largest pieces of butter are about the size of peas.

In a small bowl, stir the cream and egg yolks just to blend. Add this all at once to the flour mixture. Stir with a fork to begin combining the wet and dry ingredients and then use your hands to gently knead the mixture together until all the dry ingredients are absorbed into the dough and it can be gathered into a moist, shaggy ball. Don't overknead: This dough is sticky but benefits from minimal handling. Set the rough ball in the center of the prepared



baking sheet and pat it gently into a round about 1 inch thick and 7 inches in diameter. Don't be tempted to make the round any flatter.

With a sharp knife or a pastry scraper, cut the round into eight wedges; separate the wedges. Brush the scones with the egg-milk glaze (you won't need to use all of it) and sprinkle with the salt. Bake until the scones are deep golden and a toothpick inserted into the center of a wedge comes out clean, 18 to 22 minutes. Slide the parchment onto a rack and let the scones cool for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

Like a biscuit, but different

Originally English, scones can seem a lot like all-American biscuits. There are many similarities, but biscuits usually contain vegetable shortening or lard and are more often made with milk or buttermilk than cream. Some scone recipes also call for milk, but classic cream scones contain just that: rich sweet cream. Perhaps the biggest difference is eggs, which are a requisite for scones but absent from biscuit dough. Finally, while some bakers would faint at the suggestion of adding sugar to their biscuit dough, scones would not be what they are without it.

Best served fresh, scones are also good split and toasted the next day. They'll keep for up to two months, wrapped well and frozen. Thaw at room temperature and then warm in a 325°F oven.

Regan Daley is the author of In the Sweet Kitchen, which won the IACP Cookbook of the Year award in 2001. ♦

Buttery Shortbread

Shortbread cookies, clockwise from the top: Classic; Orange-Hazelnut; Almond Sandwiches; Brown Sugar & Oatmeal.



Cookies

The classic cookie plus four variations add up to a delicious holiday assortment

BY CAROLYN WEIL

Rich, buttery shortbread cookies are a natural for holiday gift giving. They're sturdy, they keep well for a couple of weeks, and everyone loves them. I always include at least a few of these classics in the bundles I give to friends—they're a sure hit and a great anchor for a package that includes some fancier cookies. Over the years, I've pushed the classic recipe in various directions by adding ground nuts, grated zests, and other flavors, and now it's the variations that win the most raves. Some of my friends are so addicted to my chocolate-dipped espresso shortbread cookies that I've come to expect their hinting (sometimes it's outright begging) around this time of year.

One other enticing thing about shortbread cookies is that they're among the simplest to make. For the classic, all you'll need are four ingredients: butter, sugar, flour, and salt. As for equipment, if you have a bowl, a mixer, a rolling pin, a baking sheet, and cookie cutters or a knife, you're all set.

Not too much can go awry as you make these cookies if you keep the following points in mind.

Use cold butter and don't overmix the dough. Start with butter that's refrigerator-cold to prevent the dough from warming up too fast, which would make it greasy and difficult to roll. If the dough does get soft or sticky as you're rolling or cutting it, just put it in

the refrigerator for 10 or 15 minutes to chill the butter.

When you beat the butter and sugar, you only need to mix until combined. The butter should get smoother and lose its chunkiness, but it shouldn't look light or fluffy. This isn't about beating in air. Similarly, when you add the flour, beat until the dough just comes together. It's fully mixed when the small pebbles of dough combine and clump around the beater.

Be space-efficient when cutting out the shapes. Using a cookie cutter or a knife, cut shapes as close to one another as possible to minimize the scraps. You can always press the scraps together and reroll them, but I find that after the third round of rolling, the cookies come out a bit tougher.

During baking, keep your eye on the cookies, not on the clock. These cookies get their sweet, alluring flavor from a low oven temperature (300°F) and a long baking time, which produce a complex caramelization of sugar and butter. How much they caramelize is up to you. Some people like these cookies still pale on top but golden on the edges and on the bottom; others bake them until the tops have also taken on a light golden color. Depending on how golden you want them and on the size and thickness of the cookies, the baking time can range from 30 minutes to an hour. Keep a close eye on the first batch, occasionally lifting up a cookie to check the color of the bottom.

Chocolate and ground espresso beans make a pleasing pair in these addictive shortbread cookies.



Packing and storing tips

Once baked and cooled, shortbread cookies are ready for eating, or for packing up in a box or bundle with other cookies. Whether I'm giving them as a gift, storing them, or mailing them, I like to arrange the cookies in decorative tins, using cupcake liners as separators. The cookies stay fresh for ten to fourteen days at room temperature, or for at least a month when frozen. If you're going to freeze them, be sure to wrap them well in plastic and store them in an airtight container.

Follow these rolling, cutting, and baking instructions for all five shortbread cookie recipes.

Roll

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Aim for a uniform thickness to ensure even baking.



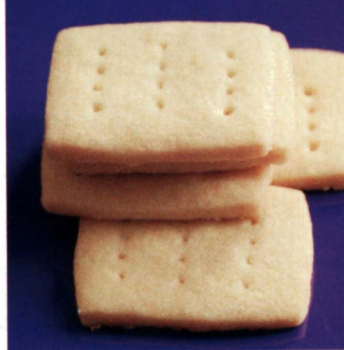
Cut

Cut the dough into bars or squares with a sharp knife or, using cookie cutters, cut out shapes as close to one another as possible. Press the scraps together, roll them out, and cut out more cookies. If the dough becomes sticky, refrigerate it briefly. Arrange the cookies on two parchment-lined baking sheets and refrigerate until chilled, at least 20 minutes.



Bake

Position oven racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Bake the cookies until golden on the bottom and edges and pale to golden on top, 30 minutes to 1 hour. (After 15 minutes, swap the position of the baking sheets and rotate them 180 degrees for even baking.) If the cookies are done before 30 minutes, reduce the oven temperature to 275°F for the remaining batches; if they take longer than 1 hour, increase the temperature to 325°F.



Classic Shortbread Cookies

Yields about 4 dozen 1½x2-inch bars.

8 ounces (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon table salt
10 ounces (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour

Line two baking sheets with parchment. Combine the butter, sugar, and salt in a stand mixer bowl (use the paddle attachment) or a large mixing bowl. Mix on low speed until the butter combines with the sugar but isn't perfectly smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the flour and mix on low speed, scraping the bowl frequently, until the dough has just about pulled together, about 3 minutes; don't overmix. Roll, cut, and bake the dough as instructed at left.



Brown Sugar & Oatmeal Shortbread Cookies

Yields about 3 dozen 3-inch cookies.

The darker the brown sugar, the deeper the cookies' flavor. You could use a more exotic brown sugar in this recipe, such as Billington's dark brown cane sugar from England or light or dark muscovado sugar (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88).

8 ounces (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup packed light or dark brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon table salt
10 ounces (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup quick-cooking oats

Line two baking sheets with parchment. Combine the butter, brown sugar, and salt in a stand mixer bowl (use the paddle attachment) or a large mixing bowl. Mix on low speed until the butter combines with the sugar but isn't perfectly smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the flour and oats and mix on low speed, scraping the bowl frequently, until the dough has just about pulled together, about 3 minutes; don't overmix. Roll, cut, and bake the dough as instructed at left.

Chocolate-Dipped Espresso Shortbread Cookies

Yields about 7 dozen 1½-inch heart-shaped cookies.

For simplicity, I usually don't temper the dipping chocolate. Instead, I melt the chocolate with shortening, which helps it set. With this method, the cookies may get spotty after a day or two. To avoid that, use tempered chocolate for dipping (see p. 18E) and omit the shortening, or else drizzle plain melted chocolate on the cookies instead of dipping them.

FOR THE COOKIES:

8 ounces (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
½ cup granulated sugar
½ teaspoon table salt
10 ounces (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons finely ground espresso coffee beans

FOR THE DIPPING CHOCOLATE:

9 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped
1 tablespoon vegetable shortening

Line two baking sheets with parchment. Combine the butter, sugar, and salt in a stand mixer bowl (use the paddle attachment) or a large mixing bowl. Mix on low speed until the butter combines with the sugar but isn't perfectly smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the flour and ground espresso and mix on low speed, scraping the bowl frequently, until the dough has just about pulled together, about 3 minutes; don't overmix. Roll, cut, and bake the dough as instructed at far left. These cookies are done when the tops look dry and the color has darkened slightly.

Dip the baked, cooled cookies:

Set a sheet of parchment or waxed paper on a work surface. Put the chocolate and shortening in a small heatproof bowl and set the bowl over a pan of simmering water. Melt the chocolate, stirring, until it's smooth and warm; don't let it get hot. Dip half of each cookie into the chocolate. Set the cookies on the parchment and let the chocolate set up at room temperature, about 2 hours.



Orange-Hazelnut Shortbread Cookies

Yields about 3 dozen 2-inch cookies.

If you can't find blanched hazelnuts, buy them with the skin on, toast them in a 425°F oven until fragrant, and then rub off as much of the skins as possible by rolling them in a damp towel.

8 ounces (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
½ cup granulated sugar
½ teaspoon table salt
10 ounces (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour
2½ ounces (½ cup) blanched hazelnuts, toasted and ground very finely in a food processor
2 teaspoons (loosely packed) finely grated orange zest (from 1 orange)

Line two baking sheets with parchment. Combine the butter, sugar, and salt in a stand mixer bowl (use the paddle attachment) or a large mixing bowl. Mix on low speed until the butter combines with the sugar but isn't perfectly smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the flour, ground hazelnuts, and zest; mix on low speed, scraping the bowl frequently, until the dough has just about pulled together, about 3 minutes; don't overmix. Roll, cut, and bake the dough as instructed at far left.

Almond Shortbread Sandwich Cookies

Yields 2½ dozen 2-inch sandwiches.

For square cookie cutters, see Great Finds, p. 32.

FOR THE COOKIES:

8 ounces (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
½ cup granulated sugar
½ teaspoon table salt
10 ounces (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour
3¾ ounces (¾ cup) finely ground almonds

FOR DECORATING:

Raspberry, plum, sour cherry, or strawberry jam
Confectioners' sugar

Line two baking sheets with parchment. Combine the butter, sugar, and salt in a stand mixer bowl (use the paddle attachment) or a large mixing bowl. Mix on low speed until the butter combines with the sugar but isn't perfectly smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the flour and almonds and mix on low speed, scraping the bowl frequently, until the dough has just about pulled together, about 3 minutes; don't overmix.

Roll the dough as instructed at far left, but with the following changes: Roll the dough ⅛ to ¼ inch thick (these cookies puff a little, and a thinner cookie makes a more appealing sandwich). To make the sandwich tops, cut a smaller shape (try circles or hearts) in the center of half of the cookies; be sure the border is fairly wide so the cookie doesn't fall apart. Bake as instructed at far left.

Assemble the baked, cooled cookies: Dollop a small amount of jam in the center of the cookie bottoms (on the flat side) and spread it lightly with a spoon all over but not quite to the edge. Dust the cookie tops with confectioners' sugar. Sandwich the tops and bottoms together. The jam remains soft for a day or two, so these cookies need extra care when packing.



Carolyn Weil, a pastry chef and a former bakery owner, is a contributor to The Baker's Dozen Cookbook. ♦

Dinner Rolls

tempting flavor variations
lift them out of the ordinary





Try fresh herbs, poppyseeds, or black pepper and Cheddar to give these easy dinner rolls a flavor twist

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

With all the details and planning that go into a throwing a dinner party, bread is often the last item on your mind. At times like this, I've noticed, homemade dinner rolls are one of the first things to be cut from the "to-do" list. But they don't have to be. The dinner rolls that follow are so easy to make and so scrumptious to eat that you won't want to take the bread off the menu—nor will you be tempted to head to your local bakery instead.

This is one of my favorite yeast doughs because it's forgiving and gives tender, flavorful results. The dough starts off a little sticky, but it quickly becomes soft and supple; you'll need little or no additional flour for handling and shaping. A stand mixer makes mixing easy, but if you don't have one, follow the hand method on p. 73.

If you're a more experienced baker, you'll notice that this dough has more fat than what's known as a lean dough (from which you get a crustier, chewier result, as opposed to the softer one here). The fat gives flavor and tenderness and that familiar homemade-roll softness.

Simple flavorings for a neat twist

The great thing about these rolls is that depending on what else I'm serving, I can vary the flavor.

Poppyseeds are a great way to dress up plain dinner rolls with a classic touch. I do it twice, working some into the dough and then sprinkling more on the tops just before baking. Poppyseed rolls are delicious with all kinds of dishes, but especially good with roast turkey or grilled salmon steaks.

Fresh herbs tossed into the dough near the end of kneading give a burst of flavor. Take care not to add the herbs too soon or the dough will be tinted green. The herbs usually throw a little moisture, so you may need a bit of flour on the board (you won't with the other variations). Herb rolls pair nicely with grilled or baked chicken or a wintry stew.

Cheddar and black pepper make for a heartier finished roll. The Cheddar flavor is subtle—I grate the cheese quite finely—and the black pepper gives a pleasant bite. Be sure to add the grated Cheddar before the dough is fully formed or you'll end up with clumps of cheese and a greasy result. I love these rolls with seared steak or roast beef.

When I'm invited to a dinner party, I offer to bring a batch or two of my flavored dinner rolls, instead of, say, a bottle of wine. They'll be a hit at the table and will help out your host or hostess in a welcome way—but without stealing the show.

Vary your rolls with some flavorful additions

Follow the instructions in colored type below to make each of the flavor variations.

For a delicious plain roll, just skip the add-ins.

Dinner Rolls

Yields 16 rolls.

16½ ounces (3⅔ cups) all-purpose flour
¼-ounce package rapid-rise yeast
⅓ cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon table salt
1 cup half-and-half
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces; more for the pan
3 large egg yolks
1 ounce (2 tablespoons) unsalted butter, melted

Mix the dough: In the bowl of a stand mixer, whisk the flour, yeast, sugar, and salt.

Fit the mixer with the dough hook. In a small saucepan over medium heat, heat the half-and-half and the 3 ounces of butter, stirring constantly, until the butter melts and the liquid registers about 120°F on an instant-read thermometer. With the mixer on medium low, pour the warm milk mixture into the dry ingredients. Add the yolks. Mix on medium low until the flour is completely incorporated, 1 to 2 minutes.

Increase the speed to medium high and knead until the dough is very smooth and elastic and pulls away from the bottom of the bowl (a little will stick to the sides), about 5 minutes.

If the dough climbs up the hook, stop the mixer and scrape the dough back into the bowl. Repeat as needed. Also, the mixer might dance around on the counter, so hold on to it.

Let the dough rise: Scrape the bowl, scoop up the dough, and shape it into a ball. Lightly grease the sides of the same bowl (or another large one) and put the dough into it. Cover the top securely with plastic. Let the

covered dough rise in a warm spot until nearly doubled in size, 45 to 55 minutes.

Portion the dough: Turn out the dough onto a clean surface and gently press to deflate. There's no need to flour the countertop or your hands (unless you're making the herb variation, in which case the dough may be sticky). With a pastry cutter or a chef's knife, divide the dough into about 16 equal pieces, 2 to 2½ ounces each. To ensure even rolls, use a scale to weigh the portions. Lightly grease a 9x13-inch Pyrex baking dish with butter.

Shape the rolls: Work with one piece of dough at a time; cover the others with plastic or a damp towel. There's no need to flour your hands (unless you're making the herb variation). Put one piece of dough on the counter. With a cupped palm, press down gently but firmly, rolling the piece in tight circles on the work surface until it forms a smooth-skinned ball with a seam on the bottom. Put the ball, seam side down, in the greased baking dish, cover loosely with plastic, and repeat with the remaining dough. (The dough balls can be arranged in rows or placed randomly; just be sure they're even.) Cover the baking dish with plastic and let the balls rise in a warm spot until they're about one and a half times their original size and have risen about three-quarters of the way up the pan rim (they won't yet fill the pan). This will take 40 to 60 minutes, depending on the temperature of your kitchen. Meanwhile, heat the oven to 375°F.

Poppyseed: Sprinkle on 1 teaspoon poppyseeds now.

Bake the rolls: Remove the plastic wrap and bake the rolls until they're puffed and well browned, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and brush the tops with the melted butter, if you like. Serve warm.

Poppyseed: Add 1 tablespoon poppyseeds to the flour mixture now.

Cheddar & Black Pepper: Add 5 ounces (about 2 cups loosely packed) finely shredded extra-sharp Cheddar and 2 teaspoons coarsely ground black pepper now.

Herb: Add about ¾ cup chopped fresh herbs (try ½ cup flat-leaf parsley, ¼ cup chives, and 1 teaspoon thyme) now.

Soft and chewy dinner rolls come from a supple, silky dough.



No mixer? It's easy by hand

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, yeast, sugar, and salt. In a small saucepan, heat the half-and-half and the 3 ounces of butter, stirring constantly, until the butter melts and the liquid registers about 120°F on an instant-read thermometer. Make a well in the dry ingredients and pour the warm milk mixture into it. Beat the egg yolks just to combine; add them to the bowl. Mix with a wooden spoon until the flour is completely incorporated. When the dough becomes difficult to stir

with a spoon, use one hand to anchor the bowl and knead with the other by pushing the dough with the heel of your hand, lifting it up, and folding it over. Knead in the bowl until the dough is no longer sticky and then turn it onto the countertop. (There's no need to flour the counter unless you're making the herb variation.) Continue kneading until the dough is smooth, supple, and elastic, 8 to 10 minutes. (Add the variation ingredients at the intervals indicated in the the master recipe.)

What you can do ahead

A day ahead, prepare the dough, shape the rolls, and arrange them in a baking dish. Cover with plastic and refrigerate overnight. Take the rolls out of the fridge about 4 hours before you want to bake them. Set them in a warm place until they rise as described in the recipe.

Or, bake the rolls a day ahead and store them, covered in the pan, at room temperature. Reheat at 300°F, covered loosely with foil, until warm.

The baked rolls can also be frozen for up to two months before thawing at room temperature. Reheat as instructed above.



The shaped rolls have a tight skin on the top and a neat seam on the bottom.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is the author of the forthcoming book, The Weekend Baker. ♦

StepbyStep

for a holiday showstopper,
Make a Roulade



*Chocolate Roulade with
Orange-Vanilla Filling*

An easy-to-handle chocolate sponge cake and a step-by-step guide guarantees impressive—and delicious—results

BY EMILY LUCHETTI

When it's time to whip up that stunner of a holiday dessert, I want something that's traditional but with a twist. It should elicit "oohs" and "aahs" but not require an epic amount of preparation. With a chocolate roulade, I get everything I want.

A bit like a *bûche de Noël* or yule log (but more simple and elegant), my roulade starts with a delicious chocolate sponge cake that's also surprisingly easy to handle because it's pliable enough to be rolled up, yet strong enough not to fall apart when you do that. Inside is a buttery filling. Depending on the guest list and on my mood, the filling flavor could be raspberry, mocha, orange-vanilla, or peppermint—all of which taste great with chocolate. I cover the roll with a gorgeous chocolate glaze that handles easily and gives a magnificent sheen. To serve my roulade, I set off each swirled slice with a dollop of whipped cream and a garnish that complements the filling. This impressive dessert takes a little time to put together, but with these easy-to-follow instructions, I know you'll be thrilled with the results.

1 get ready

Make your shopping list, gather your tools, and start following this step-by-step guide. You can make the cake and filling and assemble the roulade (without the glaze) a day ahead. Wrap the unglazed roulade with plastic, refrigerate it, and glaze it the next day. You can prepare the garnishes ahead, too, but whip the cream close to serving time.

Yields one roulade; serves twelve.

shopping or pantry list

8 ounces unsalted butter
1 pint heavy cream
1 dozen large eggs
3 ounces bittersweet chocolate
2½ cups granulated sugar
4 ounces Dutch-processed cocoa powder (I like Valrhona; Hershey's Dutched cocoa is fine, too)
1 packet unflavored powdered gelatin
table salt
flour for dusting the pan
pure vanilla extract
ingredients to flavor the filling and for the garnishes (see below)

tool list

measuring cups and spoons
kitchen scale (optional)
18x13-inch rimmed baking sheet (a standard half sheet pan)
parchment
dishtowel at least as big as the baking sheet
electric mixer
rubber spatula
medium sieve
wide pot or straight-sided skillet
whisk
instant-read thermometer
wire rack
2 wide offset metal spatulas
large saucepan
chef's knife

choose a flavor for the filling

Don't forget to add the ingredients for your chosen filling to your shopping list.

PEPPERMINT

peppermint extract
red food coloring (optional)

FOR THE GARNISH:

12 sprigs fresh mint (or mini candy canes or peppermint candies)

MOCHA

additional 2 ounces bittersweet chocolate

instant espresso powder (I use Medaglia d'Oro)

FOR THE GARNISH:

36 chocolate-covered espresso beans

RASPBERRY

12-ounce package frozen raspberries
raspberry liqueur, such as Chambord

FOR THE GARNISH:

1 lemon

ORANGE-VANILLA

1 vanilla bean
1 orange

FOR THE GARNISH:

candied orange zest (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 86)

2 make the cake, roll it up, and let it cool

Chocolate Sponge Cake

Yields one 18x13-inch cake.

This sponge cake is flourless—it gets substance and structure from eggs and chocolate. For the cocoa, I like to use Valrhona Dutch-processed; see p. 88 for sources. Hershey's Dutched cocoa works, too.

3 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped

2 tablespoons warm water

Softened butter for the pan

Flour for the pan

9 large eggs, separated

1 cup granulated sugar

1½ ounces (6 tablespoons) Dutch-processed cocoa powder, sifted; more for dusting

⅛ teaspoon table salt

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a double boiler, melt the chocolate with the warm water. Let cool to room temperature.

Grease the bottom of an 18x13-inch rimmed baking sheet (a standard half sheet pan) with the softened butter. Line the pan with parchment; butter and then flour the parchment.

With an electric mixer, whip the egg yolks in a large bowl on medium-high speed until light in color and beginning to thicken, 2 to 3 minutes in a stand mixer, or 3 to 5 minutes with a hand mixer. Add ½ cup of the sugar and whip until very thick and pale yellow, about 2 minutes. Reduce the speed to low and mix in the melted chocolate. With a rubber spatula, stir in the cocoa and salt until blended.

In a clean, dry bowl with clean, dry beaters (any grease will keep the whites from whipping), whip the egg whites with an electric mixer at medium speed until they're frothy and begin to increase in volume, about 30 seconds. In a steady stream, add the remaining ½ cup sugar. Increase the speed to medium high and whip until soft peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes in a stand mixer, or 4 to 6 minutes with a hand mixer. (For more on whipping egg whites, see *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 80.)

With a rubber spatula, fold the whites into the chocolate mixture in two equal additions. You can fold in the first half vigorously to lighten the yolks, but fold in the second half gently, mixing just until the batter is evenly colored with no streaks of

white. Don't overmix. Scrape the batter into the baking pan, gently spreading and smoothing it to make sure it's level. Bake until the top springs back lightly when touched, 22 to 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, spread a clean dishtowel (at least as big as the cake pan) on the counter. Using a sieve, dust the towel with cocoa powder, completely covering it (this will keep the cake from sticking to the towel as it cools).

Immediately after taking the cake from the oven, run a small knife around the inside edge to loosen it from the pan. Invert the cake pan onto the towel in one quick motion. Remove the pan. Carefully peel off the parchment. Using both hands and starting from one of the short ends, roll up the cake and the towel together. Let cool to room temperature.



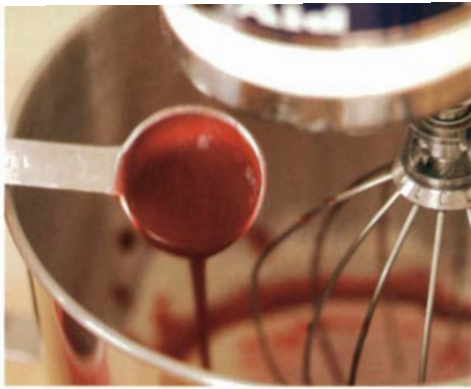
Spread the batter in the pan using a light touch so the spatula just skims the surface.



After inverting the baked cake onto a cocoa-dusted dishtowel, peel away the parchment. A light film of cake may stick to the parchment, but that's fine.



Roll up the cake and the towel together. Rolled like this, the cake will hold its finished shape better. Let it cool completely.



All the filling variations are made the same way until the last step: mixing in the flavoring of your choice.

3 make the filling

Roulade Filling

Yields enough to fill one roulade.

- 2 large egg whites**
- ½ cup granulated sugar**
- Generous pinch table salt**
- 5 ounces (10 tablespoons)**
unsalted butter, completely
softened at room temperature

To flavor the filling:
(choose one)

MOCHA

- 2 ounces bittersweet chocolate,**
melted and cooled to room
temperature
- 1 tablespoon instant espresso**
powder (I use Medaglia d'Oro)

ORANGE-VANILLA

- 1 vanilla bean, seeds scraped,**
pod saved for another use
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- Finely grated zest of 1 orange**
(about 2 tablespoons)

PEPPERMINT

- ½ teaspoon pure peppermint**
extract
- 2 to 3 drops red food coloring**
(optional)

RASPBERRY

- 12-ounce package frozen**
raspberries, thawed, puréed
in a food processor, and
strained (to yield about 1 cup
purée; 2 tablespoons needed
for the filling, reserve the
remainder for the sauce)
- 2 teaspoons raspberry liqueur,**
such as Chambord
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar;**
more to taste
- ½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice;**
more to taste
- Pinch table salt**

Fill a wide pot or straight-sided skillet with 1 to 2 inches of very hot water. In the bowl of an electric mixer, whisk the egg whites, sugar, and salt until blended. Set the bowl in the pot of hot water; make sure the water comes up to at least the level of the mixture in the bowl. Whisk until the mixture is almost hot (about 120°F), about 90 seconds. Take the bowl out of the water. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, whip the whites until cool and thick, 2 to 3 minutes. Reduce to medium speed, add the butter, a tablespoon at a time, and mix until the butter is completely incorporated. The filling should be soft and loose; it will firm up as the cake chills. (If it seems very runny, refrigerate it for up to 20 minutes.) With the mixer on low speed, blend in the flavoring of your choice:

Mocha: melted chocolate and espresso powder.

Orange-Vanilla: vanilla bean seeds, vanilla extract, and orange zest.

Peppermint: peppermint extract and food coloring, if using.

Raspberry: 2 tablespoons raspberry purée and 2 teaspoons liqueur. (Make a sauce for garnishing by combining the remaining purée with the sugar, lemon juice, and salt; add more more sugar or lemon juice to taste.)

Note: The egg whites get heated but not fully cooked; if you're concerned about safety, use pasteurized liquid egg whites, like Eggology brand.

4 fill and roll the roulade

Carefully unroll the cooled, towel-wrapped cake. Spread the filling over the cake, covering it evenly to within 2 inches of the edges. Reroll the cake, without the towel this time. The filling may squish out of the ends a bit; this is fine. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil and set a wire rack on the foil. Slide two large metal spatulas (or a spatula and your hand) under the roulade and transfer it to the rack. (Or, if working ahead, transfer it to a large sheet of plastic, wrap it snugly, and refrigerate for up to a day; transfer to the rack before glazing.)



The filling may squish out the edges a bit as you roll, but don't worry; the filling will set as it chills in the refrigerator.



Strain the glaze through a medium sieve to get the perfect texture.



Pour on the glaze to completely cover the roulade; you might need to coax it a little with a spatula.

5 glaze the roulade

This glaze is one I use on many desserts. Gelatin might seem like an unusual addition, but it gives the glaze a smooth texture and allows it to cover the cake evenly and not too thickly.

Chocolate Glaze

Yields enough to glaze one roulade.

3 tablespoons heavy cream
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup plus $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons water
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) Dutch-processed cocoa powder
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons unflavored powdered gelatin

For more information about using powdered gelatin, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 86.

In a large saucepan, combine the cream, sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the water, and the cocoa. Bring the mixture to a boil and then reduce the heat to a simmer, whisking often, until very thick, like hot fudge sauce, 8 to 10 minutes from when the mixture began simmering. Pay close attention: This mixture boils over easily. Remove the pan from the heat. While the mixture is cooling, bloom the gelatin in the remaining $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons of water as shown on p. 86. Melt the bloomed gelatin over very hot water or in the microwave. Whisk the gelatin into the chocolate mixture and strain the glaze through a medium sieve into a metal bowl. Let the glaze cool at room temperature until thick but still pourable, about 5 to 10 minutes; the glaze should be about 110° to 120°F . (If you've made the cake ahead, unwrap it and put it on a rack set over a foil-lined baking sheet.)

Pour the glaze over the roulade, using an offset spatula to help the glaze cover the top and sides evenly. Don't worry about covering the ends; they'll be trimmed later. Refrigerate uncovered for at least 30 minutes or up to 4 hours.





After chilling, use two large spatulas to transfer the roulade to a flat serving platter.



6

garnish and serve

Prepare one of the garnishes and the whipped cream as directed below.

The glaze will have “glued” the roulade to the rack, so slide a metal spatula between it and the rack to release it. Transfer the roulade to a serving platter, using two large offset spatulas to get underneath and pressing the spatulas against the rack as you go. Trim the ends of the roulade. Fill a tall container with hot water and have a dishtowel handy so that you can clean and dry the knife after cutting each slice. Using a long, sharp knife, cut $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch straight slices, or cut pieces on an angle, rinsing and drying the knife after each slice. Put a dollop of whipped cream next to each slice. Finish with the garnish alongside.

Garnishes

Use the garnish that matches your filling.

MOCHA

36 chocolate-covered espresso beans (sold in specialty shops)

ORANGE-VANILLA:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup candied orange zest (see *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 86)

PEPPERMINT:

12 fresh mint sprigs (or 12 mini candy canes or crushed peppermint candies)

RASPBERRY:

Raspberry sauce from the filling recipe (see step 3 on p. 77)

Whipped Cream

Yields enough to garnish 12 slices.

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup heavy cream

2 teaspoons granulated sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

With a whisk or hand mixer, whip together the cream, sugar, and vanilla until soft peaks form.

*Emily Luchetti is the executive pastry chef at Farallon in San Francisco. Her latest book is *A Passion for Dessert*. ♦*

A raspberry-filled roulade comes with a bonus: a raspberry sauce made with the purée used to flavor the filling.

BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

There's something magical about baking. Mix together a few ingredients, apply heat, and—presto—you end up with something quite different from what you started with...but maybe that's an oversimplification. Baking is less forgiving than cooking, and it requires a certain degree of skill and understanding of the science behind the magic. For example, how much you whip your egg whites or how toasty you let the walnuts get—these variables make a difference in the final taste and texture of your dessert. That's why we've dedicated this edition of *From Our Test Kitchen* to the little things that make a big difference...like what a recipe really means when it says “golden brown” or how a tender or flaky pie crust depends on how you mix the flour and butter.

baking is less forgiving than cooking

tip: Corn syrup is the secret to the velvety texture of the hot fudge sauce on p. 30. To get the last bit of syrup out of the glass bottle, briefly heat the “empty” bottle in the microwave (for about 20 seconds on high) to liquefy any syrup that remains sticking to the sides of the bottle. This trick works for other syrups, too, such as honey and molasses, but be careful with plastic jars. Some plastic containers, especially honey bears, may start to melt along with the syrup.

Whipping to “soft,” “medium,” and “firm” peaks



Soft peaks barely hold their shape. The peaks flop over immediately when the beaters are lifted.



Medium peaks hold their shape pretty well, except that the tip of the peak curls over on itself when the beaters are lifted.



Stiff peaks stand straight up when the beaters are lifted. (Medium-stiff peaks are just stiff enough to stand up firmly but with a slight curl at the tip.)

When cream or eggs are whipped, air gets trapped inside and causes the ingredient to foam, grow in volume, and become stiff. Whipped eggs, especially egg whites, are great leaveners for baked goods. In the oven, the trapped air expands, causing something like a cake or soufflé to rise. But sometimes whipped whites can be unstable and difficult to work with, so a stabilizer such as sugar or an acid (like vinegar or cream of tartar) is often added to the whites. Sugar also increases the coagulation temperature of the egg protein, allowing the cake or soufflé to rise more before it sets. Recipes usually instruct you to whip egg whites or cream to a particular firmness, or peak stage. The photos at left show you what those stages should look like. We're showing sugar-stabilized egg whites, but the characteristics of each stage apply to cream as well.



golden brown

light golden brown

What we mean by “golden brown”

You often see the term “golden brown” used in recipes as an indicator of doneness, but like all colors, there are many shades of golden brown. So how do you know when something is golden brown *enough*? Generally, the darker brown something is, the more flavorful it will be. Pie crust and nuts are two perfect examples: Many cooks tend to let them get only a little golden for fear of burning them, when actually letting them go just a minute or two more for a darker shade of golden brown would mean fuller flavor. So unless a recipe calls for “light golden brown,” go ahead and push the golden envelope a little. Just don’t wander off and let things go from deeply golden brown to burnt.

Room-temperature eggs & butter in a hurry

Sometimes the urge to bake strikes without warning, leaving your eggs and butter unprepared for the sudden call to action. Fortunately, there’s no need to wait long if you need room-temperature eggs or softened butter for a recipe. Cold eggs can be warmed in minutes by putting them in a bowl of very warm water. To soften cold butter quickly, you need to increase the surface area that’s exposed to room temperature. Cut the butter into small cubes, separate the cubes into a single layer, and let them

sit on the counter. They’ll reach optimal creaming temperature (65° to 68°F) in about 30 minutes. I’ve found that flattening butter with a rolling pin or skillet, as some sources suggest, doesn’t offer a significant time advantage over the cubing method.



Using up scraped vanilla beans

Once we’ve scraped the seeds from a vanilla bean, we usually stash the empty bean halves in a container of sugar to make vanilla sugar for coffee and other treats. But we’ve been going through a lot of vanilla beans lately, and since there’s only so much vanilla sugar a cook can use, we thought we’d ask some of our contributing bakers what they do with their empty beans.

Regan Daley: “I collect a lot of them and pop them into a custard base or a syrup that’s heated on the stove. Five or six scraped vanilla bean halves add up to one whole bean and will infuse a custard or syrup just as well. I also put them in a bottle of vodka or brandy. I keep putting the beans in as I use them (I give the bottle a swirl every now and then), and the flavor just gets more intense. It makes a nice little after-dinner drink.”

Carolyn Weil: “If I scrape out a vanilla bean and don’t use it to infuse something else, like a custard—in other words, it’s still ‘clean’—I put it in a small jar of orange liqueur to flavor the liqueur for future baking. I actually store my whole vanilla beans in vanilla extract. It keeps them from drying out, and they stay nice and plump so it’s easy to scrape out the seeds.”

Rose Levy Beranbaum: “I sometimes use the bean as a decoration for a dessert that features vanilla, such as a vanilla cheesecake. I simply lay the bean on the top—it has such a graceful curve.”



What makes a pie crust tender or flaky?



Fat that's cut into flour until it's "pea-sized" will produce a crust with large flakes.

The ideal pie crust has two main characteristics: tenderness and flakiness. Tenderness is a function of managing gluten, which develops from the proteins in flour. In a pie crust, you want to create just enough gluten so that the dough holds together. Some ways of controlling the gluten are by using all-purpose or pastry flour (both of which have a moderate protein content), by using minimal liquid, and by kneading gently to bring the dough together. Overdoing any of these will mean too much gluten and a tough crust.

Flakiness comes from the solid fat (butter, shortening, lard, or cream cheese) that's used to make the dough. The fat is mixed or "cut" into the flour so it stays in discernible pieces. During baking, the pieces of fat melt away, leaving air pockets that then expand a little from steam. The result is a slightly risen crust of layers separated by the air pockets—in other words, a flaky crust. The size of the fat pieces in the raw dough determines the quality of the flakiness in the crust: The larger the pieces of fat, the larger the flakes.



Fat and flour that are cut together until they resemble "coarse meal" will result in a dough with small, fine flakes. This is sometimes called a mealy or sandy dough.



favorite gadget

The Giant Spatula

During the recipe testing for this issue, we found one gadget to be indispensable: our red-handled giant spatula. We especially loved it for moving around freshly rolled-out pie dough. At about 10 inches square, the spatula is big enough to fully support a round of dough as you transfer it from work surface to pie pan. With the spatula, you don't risk tearing the dough under its own weight, as sometimes happens when you wrap dough around the rolling pin to move it. The spatula is also handy for moving whole cakes and split layers. For sources, see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88.

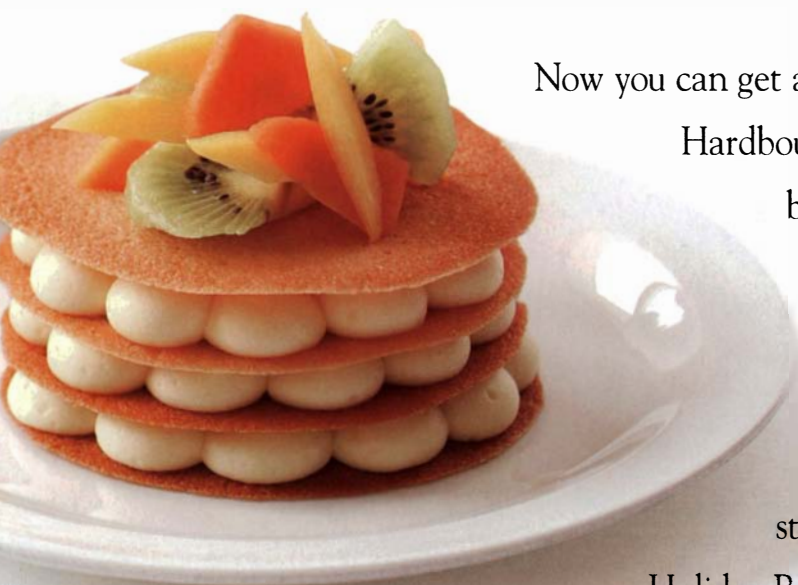


The Test Kitchen Reference Desk

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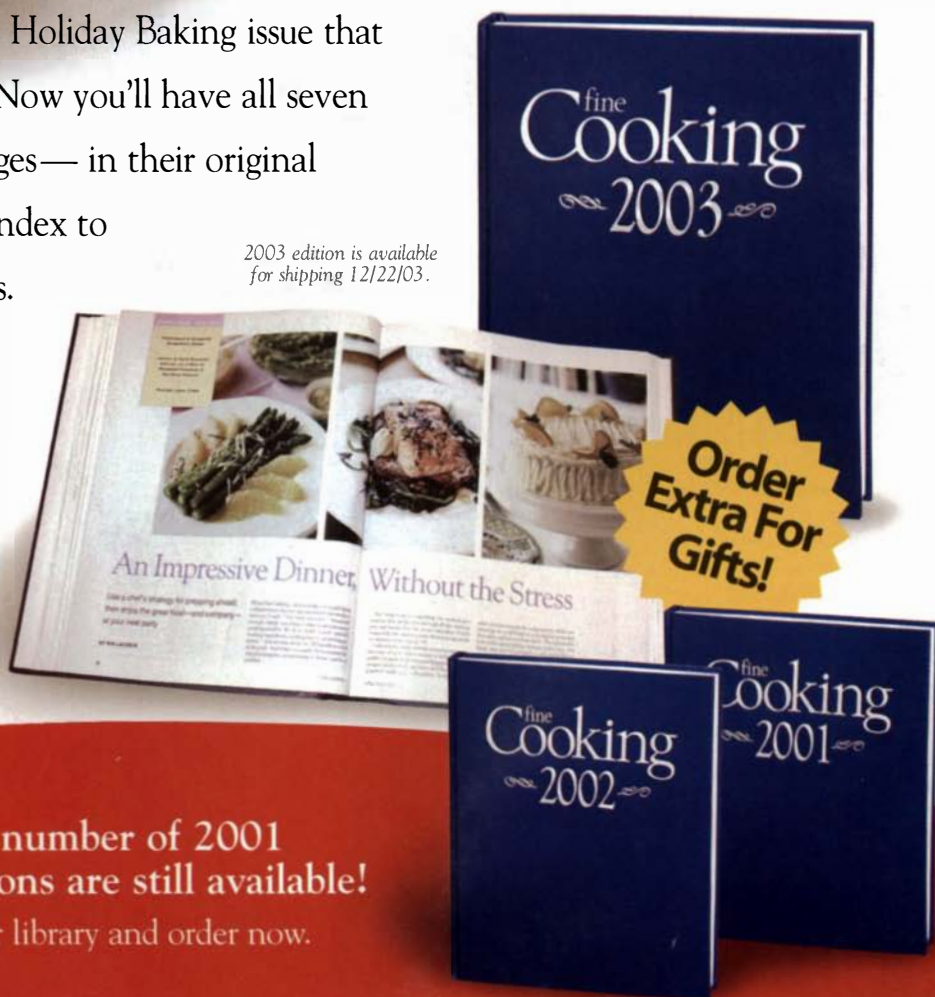
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ingredient

Cocoa powder

Regular

VS.

Dutch-processed



While skimming through this issue, you might notice that some recipes call for unsweetened regular, or “natural,” cocoa powder while others call for Dutch-processed cocoa. Regular cocoa is intense and full flavored; it’s also somewhat acidic. Dutch-processed cocoa (also called Dutched or European-style) is treated with an alkali to neutralize its acidity. The treatment process, invented by a Dutchman in 1828, smoothes and mellows the cocoa’s flavor and darkens its color. The two types of cocoa aren’t necessarily interchangeable because the leavening agents in recipes are typically balanced against the specific pH of the cocoa. (That is, baking soda, which is alkaline, is generally paired with natural cocoa to neutralize its acidity; baking powder is paired with Dutched cocoa because both ingredients are essentially neutral already.) A well-stocked baker’s pantry includes both types. Dutch-processed cocoa isn’t as widely available as natural cocoa, but some supermarkets do carry both. For sources, see p. 88.

Chocolate Cherry Coconut Macaroons

Yields about 20 macaroons.

These rich macaroons are moist and fudgy inside—they’re something like a cross between a cookie and a chocolate truffle.

- 1¾ cups sweetened shredded coconut**
- ⅔ cup cream of coconut, such as Coco Lopez (not coconut milk)**
- ⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa powder, preferably Dutch-processed**
- 2 large egg whites**
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- Pinch table salt**
- 3 ounces (½ cup) dried cherries (preferably tart ones), coarsely chopped**

Heat the oven to 325°F. Spread 1½ cups of the shredded coconut on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake, stirring frequently, until some of the shreds begin to turn a light golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes (you’re not so much toasting the coconut as you are drying it). Let cool. Turn off the oven.

In a medium bowl, whisk the cream of coconut, cocoa, egg whites, vanilla, and salt until well combined. Stir in the dried cherries and the “toasted” coconut. Cover and refrigerate until thoroughly chilled and firm, at least 2 hours and up to 24 hours.

About 20 minutes before you plan to bake the macaroons, heat the oven to 325°F. Line a heavy baking sheet with parchment. With damp hands, shape slightly heaping tablespoons of the batter into balls. Arrange on the baking sheet about 2 inches apart (they should all fit on one sheet). Top each macaroon with a pinch of the remaining untoasted coconut. Bake in the center of the oven until the outsides are no longer sticky but the insides still feel somewhat soft when poked with a finger and the coconut topping is golden brown, about 20 minutes. Let the macaroons cool for 3 minutes on the baking sheet before transferring them to a rack to let cool completely.





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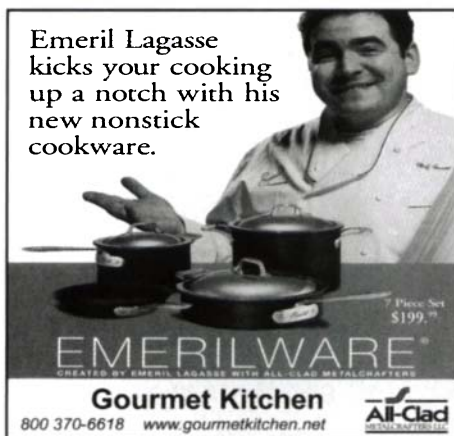
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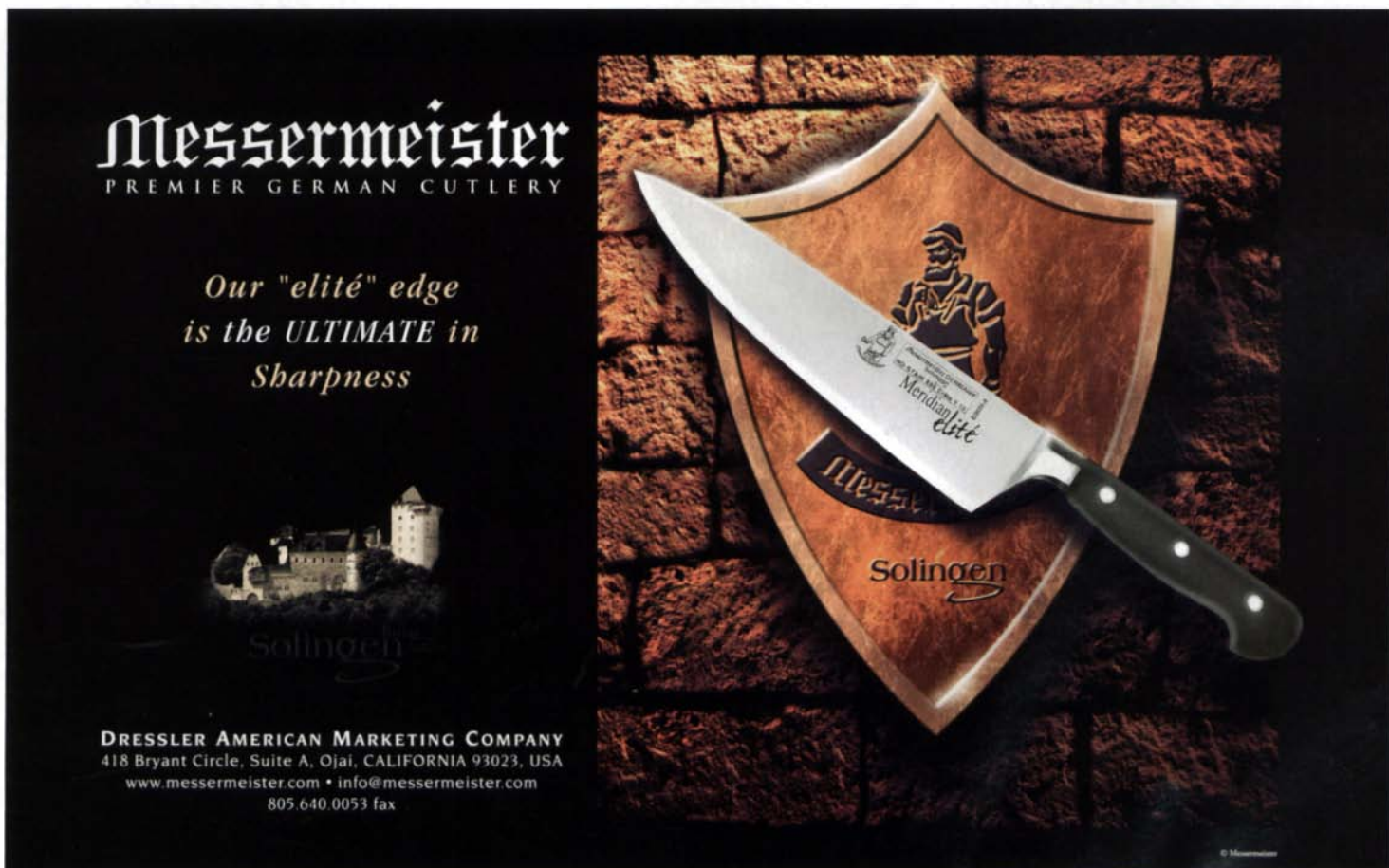
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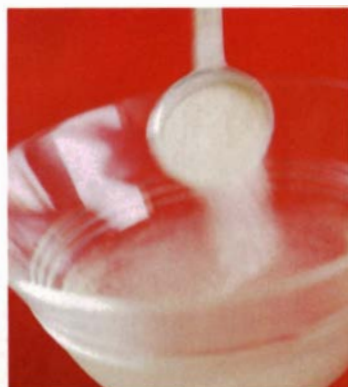
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“Blooming” gelatin



Sprinkle or “rain” the powdered gelatin evenly over its softening liquid to keep lumps from forming.



Set the gelatin aside for a few minutes until it swells or “blooms” as it absorbs the liquid.



Melt the gelatin either in a hot water bath or in a microwave (for about 10 seconds on high) until it becomes translucent. Use your fingers to check that all the granules have totally dissolved.

Gelatin isn't an everyday ingredient, but learning to work with it can give you spectacular-looking desserts, like the roulade on p. 74. Gelatin is what gives that gorgeous sheen to the cake's glaze.

Working with gelatin (a stabilizer derived from animal collagen) isn't difficult, but before adding it to a recipe, it must be softened and then melted. For powdered gelatin, the softening process is also known as “blooming.” Follow the photos at left.

Gelatin tips

- ❖ For every 2 teaspoons powdered gelatin, use about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup liquid for blooming.
- ❖ One $\frac{1}{4}$ -ounce packet of Knox brand powdered gelatin contains about $2\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons.
- ❖ Always add softened gelatin to warm or hot mixtures; adding the gelatin to a cold mixture will make it firm up immediately, creating an unpleasant stringy or lumpy texture.
- ❖ Although powdered gelatin is the form most widely used by home cooks, sheet gelatin is preferred by some pros. The sheets are standardized regardless of thickness or dimension, so two sheets equal 1 teaspoon Knox brand powder (other powder brands may differ in their gelling power). Soften sheet gelatin by soaking it in cold water for about 10 minutes. Squeeze it to drain excess liquid before you melt it into the liquid ingredients in the recipe.

A great idea for garnishing



Candied Citrus Zest

Yields $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.

To make the candied orange zest garnish for the chocolate roulade with orange-vanilla filling (p. 74), we used a recipe from Richard Leach, the pastry chef at Park Avenue Café in New York. He uses the candied strips of zest to dress up any dessert with a citrusy flavor. They're also a pretty addition to a plate of cookies. Recipe courtesy of John Wiley & Sons, from the book *Sweet Sensations*, by Richard Leach.

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup lemon, orange, or lime zest, or a combination (use a vegetable peeler to remove the zest in strips; avoid getting too much white pith), thinly sliced

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar; more for dredging

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup water

1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

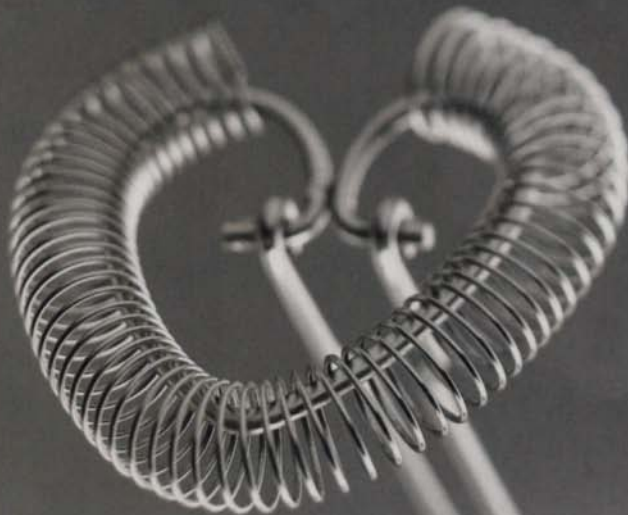
2 tablespoons light corn syrup

Put the zest in a small saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to a quick boil and drain. Repeat the process. (This blanching removes some of the zest's bitterness.) Put the drained zest in the saucepan again and add the sugar, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, and lemon juice. Bring to a boil and add the corn syrup. Boil until the mixture reaches 240°F on a candy thermometer, about 5 minutes. Pour into a sieve, let drain, and let cool slightly. Spread the zest on a baking sheet and let cool completely, 20 to 30 minutes. Dredge the zest in sugar, if you like. Store in an airtight container for up to four days.



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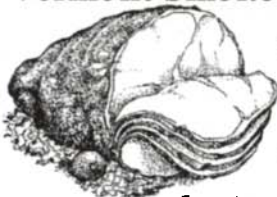
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Four Easy Cakes p. 42

For the Nordicware bundt pans and mini bundt pans, visit **Kitchen Etc.** (www.kitchenetc.com; 800-232-4070). The pans run from \$24.99 to \$27.99.

Scones p. 62

For crystallized ginger, look for **Melissa's** or **McCormick** brands, both available in supermarkets. If your grocer doesn't carry it, try **Gingerpeople.com**. The ginger beer company **Reed's** distributes crystallized ginger to natural-foods stores; for retail locations, visit www.reedsgingerbrew.com. For chocolate chunks, see the sources under Baking with Chocolate at right.

Make-Ahead Pies p. 56

American Spoon Foods (www.spoon.com; 888-735-6700) carries dried tart cherries in 6-ounce (\$5.50) and 1-pound (\$11.95) bags. For a pie shield to protect your crust from too much browning (\$4.99), go to **Kitchen Etc.** (www.kitchenetc.com; 800-232-4070). **Sur La Table** (www.surlatable.com; 800-243-0852) sells several different pizza stones, which range in price from \$29.95 to \$89.95. For information on **HearthKits**, the ceramic oven inserts, see www.hearthkit.com.

Shortbread p. 66

To buy muscovado sugar, see the source under World Cuisines at right.



Roulade p. 74

Emily Luchetti recommends Valrhona Dutch-processed cocoa powder. **Chocosphere.com** (877-992-4626) carries an 8.8-ounce package for \$8.50.

Ingredients p. 14

For a nutmeg grater, check your local kitchenware store or visit **Complementstothechef.com** (800-895-2433), where a stainless-steel version is \$3.40. For spices such as cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves, look to

What every baker needs

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For large, flexible offset spatulas, contact **Bridge Kitchenware** (212-688-4220; www.bridgekitchenware.com).

Visit **The Baker's Catalogue** (www.kingarthurflour.com; 800-827-6836) for heavy-duty rimmed 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x13x1-inch baking

sheets, known by professional chefs as half sheet pans (\$17.95). The Baker's Catalogue also carries half sheets of parchment that fit perfectly in a half sheet pan. The parchment comes in a stiff cardboard tube, so it's easy to store (\$14.95 for 100 sheets).



Trading Cookies *p. 50*

Kitchenemporium.com (888-858-7920) sells Villaware and Kuhn-Rikon spritz presses (\$17.95 to \$49.95). For the vanilla bean paste in the Macadamia Lace Cookies, try **Cooking.com** (800-663-8810), where 4 ounces is \$12.95. **Sur La Table** (800-243-0852; www.surlatable.com) carries nonstick baking mats (\$19.95 to \$24.95)



Penzeys (www.penzeys.com; 800-741-7787).

Sauces for Gift Giving *p. 26*

If you make your own sauces, design your own professional-looking custom labels—they look great on homemade gifts.

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World Cuisines *p. 34*

To buy Golden Baker's Natural Cane Sugar, as well as light and dark muscovado sugar, call **La Cuisine** (800-521-1176). This culinary store and mail-order source, based in Alexandria, Virginia, carries 1-pound bags for \$5.50 and 3-pound jars for \$14.50. Medjool dates are available through **Kalustyans.com** (800-352-3451) for \$7.99 per pound.



From Our Test Kitchen *p. 80*

Test kitchen manager Jennifer Armentrout's favorite baking gadget, the giant spatula is \$16.95 at **The Baker's Catalogue** (800-827-6836; www.kingarthurflour.com).

Baking with Chocolate *p. 18E*

To buy bittersweet and semisweet chocolate and chocolate chips, including brands like Scharffen Berger and Callebaut, look up **Chocosphere.com** (877-992-4626), **Chocolatesource.com**, or **New York Cake Supplies** (www.nycake.com; 800-942-2539).

This metal dipping fork set from **Kitchen Krafts** (800-776-0575; www.kitchenkrafts.com) allows you to dip items in chocolate with minimal marking. The kit, which is \$9.95, includes a loop and a two-pronged fork.

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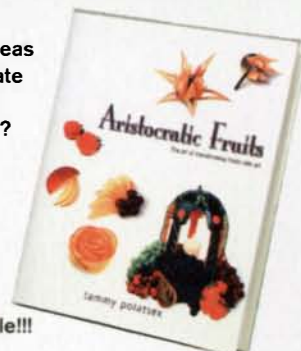
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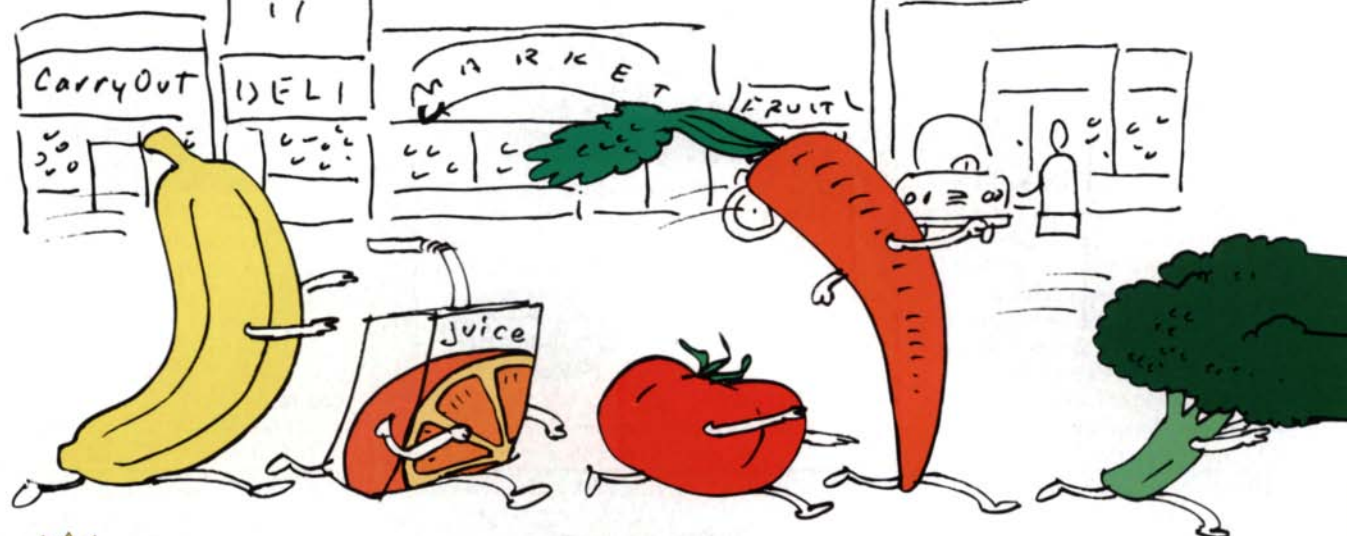
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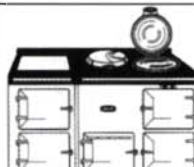
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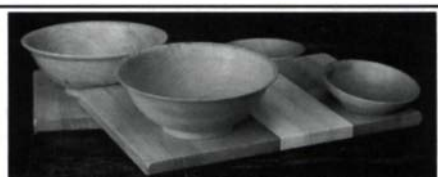
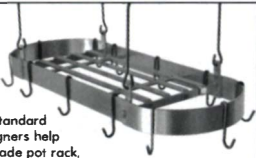


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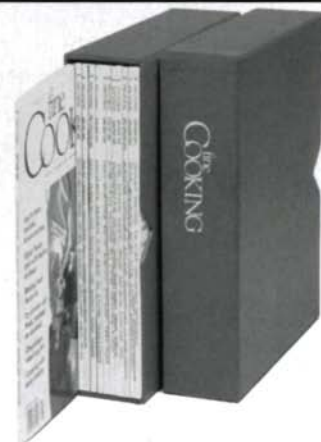
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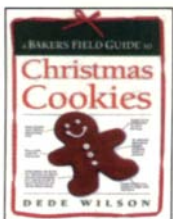
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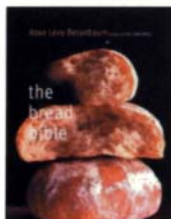
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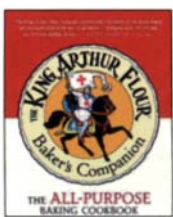
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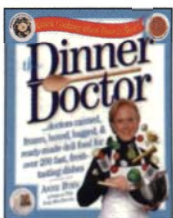
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what's inside



baking with chocolate

BY JOANNE SMART



Chocolate is the most popular dessert flavoring, loved by just about everybody. And while eating chocolate rarely brings about anxiety, baking with it can. That's why we've gathered these tips for choosing, handling, storing, and decorating with chocolate together in one place. We hope all this information will help make baking with chocolate as wonderful an experience as popping a piece of the really good stuff in your mouth. And just so you'll have plenty of practice, we've asked chocolate maven Alice Medrich for some of her favorite recipes, including brownies, an easy and delicious cake, a rich hot cocoa, and more.

which brand? three things to consider

You have a lot of choice when shopping for chocolate. Super-market brands (Baker's, Nestlé, Hershey's, Ghirardelli), big European chocolate makers (Valrhona, Lindt, Callebaut), international brands such as Venezuelan El Rey, and newer boutique chocolate makers, such as Scharffen Berger in California and Michel Cluizel in France, can all be good (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88, for sources). Which chocolate do you choose?

First, consider taste.

The chocolate you bake with should taste good to you when eaten out of hand, so be sure to sample it when you get it home. Better yet, buy a few different kinds and have a chocolate tasting to decide what you like best.

Second, consider value and what you will be baking.

The qualities that make high-end chocolates so distinctive right out of the wrapper can become muted in certain baked goods. Since you'll pay more for really good chocolate, save it for when it really counts—when you're making sweets in which the chocolate is most pronounced, such as a sauce or a flourless chocolate cake.

Third, consider the form in which the chocolate comes.

Chocolate for baking is manufactured in squares, thin bars, and thick blocks. Thin bars are convenient to store and can be easier to chop than blocks, which take a bit of elbow grease to knock apart. Some better quality chocolates only come in huge blocks, which are great for pros but may be too big a quantity for home cooks. Fortunately, specialty stores often sell smaller chunks of the blocks wrapped in plastic.

decorating with chocolate

Garnishes of chocolate pack a double punch: They not only taste delicious, but they look great, too. For these simple ideas, all you need is chocolate and your own sweets to decorate; if you want a professional “glossy” look for dipping or shapes, temper your chocolate first (see Tempering at far left).



Chocolate “confetti”

Shavings of chocolate add a jaunty look to an iced cake. Drag a vegetable peeler across a thick block of chocolate and collect the shavings on a paper plate or a sheet of parchment.



Chocolate curls

Make these as you would confetti, but warm the chocolate slightly first (microwaving in 5-second jolts works well) or warm the peeler under hot water and dry it well. Apply more pressure with the vegetable peeler to get longer strips that will curl naturally. Let them fall in a single layer onto a paper plate or piece of parchment. Rewarm the block of chocolate or the peeler as necessary.



Decorative drizzle

To give shortbread cookies or a simple cake a pretty finishing touch, improvise a piping bag from a small heavy-duty zip-top bag. Scrape melted chocolate into the bag, seal it, and gather the chocolate into one corner. Snip off a small bit of the tip and you're ready to drizzle.



Chocolate shapes

Spread melted chocolate about 1/8 inch thick on waxed paper or parchment. Chill until it's no longer soft but not yet hard. Cut shapes with a sharp knife or a cookie cutter. Chill the cutouts until you're ready to use them. Be sure the dessert you decorate has cooled so that the cutouts won't soften or melt. Shapes will look best and have the snappiest texture if you temper the chocolate first (see far left).



Chocolate dipping

What doesn't look and taste better dipped in a little chocolate? See the ideas at right and then follow a few “dip tips” for the best results.

Use tempered chocolate for professional-looking results (see far left). If you're going to chill or freeze the dipped item, tempering is less important.

Be sure the item is dry and at room temperature. Any moisture can cause the chocolate to seize.

Use tweezers, forks, or specialized dipping tools for easier dipping with great results. For sources for dipping tools, see *Where to Buy It*, p. 88.

Dip only halfway to allow the item's original color and texture to contrast with the chocolate.

Set the dipped items on parchment-lined baking sheets and allow the chocolate to set for 1 to 2 hours.

things to dip:

Bananas, biscotti, candied citrus zest, candied ginger, cocktail pretzels, coffee beans, dates, dried apricots, figs, grapes, nuts, shortbread, strawberries, truffle centers.

handling chocolate

As delicious as it is, chocolate can sometimes be a little finicky, so for the best results, store it in a cool, dry place, chop it evenly, and melt it gently.

chopping

If you plan to melt chocolate, you'll have less chance of scorching it if you first chop it as evenly as possible. When chopping chocolate, tiny shards inevitably get everywhere. For easy cleanup, line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment and put your cutting board on top of that. Use the paper to gather the shards.

To chop a thick slab of chocolate, set the blade of your biggest knife (preferably a chef's knife) on a



corner of the slab and bear down with both hands to break off a small bit; repeat. As that corner becomes a flat edge, turn the slab and begin cutting at another corner.

For chopping large amounts of chocolate, a food processor can work. Break thin bars into pieces and pulse in the processor with the steel blade until it's evenly chopped. (Sometimes a few pieces resist chopping; break these into smaller pieces and keep pulsing.) For block chocolate, cut the block into chunks that will fit in the feed tube and use the coarse grating disk (heavy block chocolate might damage the machine if you use the steel blade).

melting

We've found that melting chocolate on the stove is easier and more consistent than in the microwave, though both methods work.

Stovetop method: Put chopped chocolate in a heatproof bowl that fits snugly over a pot of barely simmering water (or put the bowl directly in a wide, shallow skillet of barely simmering water). Stir occasionally until the chocolate is melted and smooth; remove it from the heat. Don't let water come in contact with the chocolate, and be sure the bowl and spoon or spatula are perfectly dry. Small amounts of water can cause chocolate to "seize," or turn into a stiff, grainy mess. Seized chocolate can be brought back to a smooth state by adding cream, but this can affect your recipe, so it's often best to start over and set the seized chocolate aside for a recipe that calls for a lot of cream.

Microwave method: Put chopped chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl and heat it at 50% power for 1 minute; remove and stir. (In a microwave, chocolate doesn't lose its shape as it melts, so you must stir it to gauge how far along it is.) Return it to the microwave and repeat, stopping to stir every 15 seconds to prevent scorching.

tempering

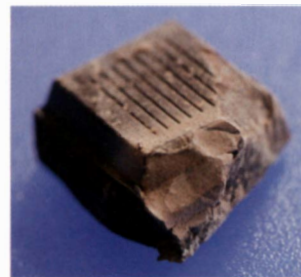
For a smooth, glossy look when making candies or using melted chocolate for decorating and dipping, temper your chocolate. Tempering isn't necessary, but it's a technique worth learning if you want your chocolate to have a nice sheen and a crisp snap. Most baking chocolate comes tempered, but as soon as it melts, it loses its temper and will look dull and have a softer texture.

There are many ways to temper chocolate, some more elaborate than others. Here's an effective method: Start with at least 1 pound good-quality chopped chocolate. Gently melt about three-quarters of it in the top of a double boiler (the water should be barely simmering) until it reaches 115°F. Take the chocolate off the water and stir in the remaining chopped chocolate, a little at a time, until the mixture registers 86°F; then put the chocolate back over the hot water and bring the temperature up and hold it between 88° and 91°F for semi- and bittersweet chocolate (84° to 87°F for milk and white chocolate). Move the chocolate on and off the water as needed to maintain the temperature. The tempered chocolate can now be used to dip, coat, or glaze.

storing

Chocolate will keep for a year at room temperature. It's best to keep it stored below 70°F. Wrap it in a few layers of plastic to keep it as airtight as possible and put it in a dark cupboard, away from strong-smelling foods. (Chocolate, like butter, will absorb strong aromas.) You can store chocolate in the refrigerator or freezer, but a moist environment isn't the best. If you do chill your chocolate, bring it to room temperature while still wrapped to prevent condensation from forming, as any water on the chocolate can interfere with its ability to melt smoothly.

Don't worry about the white stuff. Sometimes you'll notice a white "bloom" on your chocolate. While bloom can affect the mouth-feel of a chocolate if you're eating it out of hand, it won't have any adverse effects



if you're melting the chocolate for baking. There are two kinds of bloom. "Fat bloom," which looks like a white film, occurs when chocolate gets too warm and the cocoa butter separates from the chocolate emulsion. "Sugar bloom" is caused by condensation of water on the chocolate's surface, which dissolves the surface sugar and makes the chocolate look dull and blotchy after the moisture evaporates.

choosing chocolate for baking

Whether a chocolate is called unsweetened, bittersweet, or semisweet depends mostly on the percentage of chocolate liquor the chocolate contains. (Chocolate liquor is the paste made from ground cocoa nibs, which are extracted from roasted cocoa beans. The liquor contains cocoa butter and cocoa solids.) Most European and some American brands print the percentage of chocolate liquor on the label. A label of 70% chocolate means the bar contains about 70% chocolate liquor and about 30% sugar. (Vanilla and lecithin generally account for about 1% of the total ingredients.) But many manufacturers don't list the percentages. In the U.S., dark chocolates by law must contain at least 35% chocolate liquor, and most brands of semi- and bittersweet contain 50% or more. Here's a rundown of the various types of chocolate:



semisweet & bittersweet chocolate

Traditionally, these can be used interchangeably, with semisweet giving a slightly sweeter result. Bittersweet generally contains less sugar than semisweet, but the distinction between the two types becomes hazy between brands. For example, a bittersweet chocolate offered by a supermarket brand likely has more sugar than a semisweet chocolate made by a premium chocolate maker.

unsweetened chocolate

Unsweetened chocolate contains no sugar and so is about 99% chocolate liquor. It's extremely bitter and cannot be used interchangeably with semisweet or bittersweet chocolate.

milk chocolate

Although popular to eat out of hand, milk chocolate is used less widely in baking than semi- or bittersweet chocolate. In the U.S., milk chocolate must contain a minimum of 10% chocolate liquor (though it often contains more) and 12% milk solids. In Europe, milk chocolate must contain 30% chocolate liquor and 18% dry milk solids, as well as 26% total fat. (A controversial new regulation allows European milk chocolate makers to replace up to 5% of the cocoa butter with vegetable fat as long as it's indicated on the label.)

gianduia (gianduja)

This silky-smooth hazelnut-flavored chocolate (pronounced john-doo-yah) comes in milk and dark chocolate versions. The term is also used to describe the flavor pairing of chocolate and hazelnut.

chocolate chips

Specially formulated morsels that retain their shape and creamy texture without burning, chips are ideal as mix-ins for cookies and quick breads. Since they contain significantly less cocoa butter, they behave differently than bar chocolate when melted, so it's best not to substitute chips when bitter- or semisweet chocolate is called for. But if a recipe calls for chips, you can often substitute coarsely chopped semi- or bittersweet chocolate.

white chocolate

Technically, this isn't really chocolate at all since it contains no cocoa solids, only cocoa butter mixed with sugar, milk solids, and flavorings.

cocoa powder

Made of finely ground partially defatted cocoa solids, cocoa powder comes in two styles: natural (usually simply labeled unsweetened cocoa powder) and Dutch-processed (or alkalized), which has been treated with alkali to neutralize its natural acidity. Both taste bitter out of the box, but natural cocoa has a fruitier, more acidic chocolate flavor, while Dutched cocoa is mellow, with an almost nutty flavor. In recipes without a chemical leaven, taste alone can be your guide, but for most baking recipes, it's best to use the style called for, as Dutched and natural cocoas react differently with baking soda and baking powder (for more on this, see p. 84). There are flavor variations among brands. You might find that you love the complex flavor of premium brands, such as Merckens and Valrhona, or you might prefer the familiar flavor of the supermarket brands like Hershey's and Nestlé.

baking with high-percentage chocolate

Some bittersweet or semisweet chocolates contain significantly higher than average amounts of chocolate liquor. Using these chocolates in recipes not specifically designed for them can give you disappointing results: Cakes can turn out dry or overbaked, and ganaches can curdle. For better results with chocolates labeled 66% or higher, Alice Medrich recommends using 25% to 35% less chocolate than called for in the recipe and adding up to 1½ teaspoons more granulated sugar for each ounce of chocolate originally called for.

recipes

BY ALICE MEDRICH

We asked chocolate expert Alice Medrich to share a few of her favorite recipes. Alice, whose books include *Cocolat* and *A Year in Chocolate*, has a new obsession regarding chocolate, detailed in her latest book, *Bittersweet: Recipes & Tales from a Chocolate Life*. The recipes that follow are not only delicious, but they also provide a better understanding of how different kinds of chocolate behave.

Bittersweet Cocoa Brownies

Yields 16 brownies.

Brownies made with cocoa powder are softer on the inside than those made with bar chocolate. I like the tart and lively flavor of natural cocoa powder here; Dutch-processed gives a mellow flavor. Try both types to see which you like best.

2¼ ounces (¾ cup) unsweetened cocoa powder
1½ cups granulated sugar
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon table salt
5 ounces (10 tablespoons) hot melted unsalted butter
2 cold large eggs
1½ ounces (⅓ cup) all-purpose flour
1 cup broken walnut or pecan pieces (optional)

Heat the oven to 325°F. Line an 8x8-inch baking pan (preferably metal) with foil across the bottom and up two opposite sides of the pan.

In a medium bowl, thoroughly mix the cocoa, sugar, vanilla, salt, and hot melted butter with a hand mixer or with vigorous strokes of a whisk. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating until the batter is thick and lightened in color, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the flour and stir with a rubber spatula just until blended. Fold in the nuts, if using. Spread the batter evenly in the prepared pan and bake until the top is puffed and slightly crusted and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with a little fudge batter clinging to it, 28 to 30 minutes.

Let the brownies cool completely in the pan on a rack. Lift the ends of the foil to remove them. Invert the brownies on a tray and peel off the foil. Turn the brownies right side up on a cutting board and cut into squares (wipe the knife between each cut, as the brownies will be soft and sticky).



Fastest Fudge Cake

Serves eight to ten.

I get the best results stirring this batter with a wooden spoon or rubber spatula. This cake is delicious on its own but even better topped with ganache.

4½ ounces (1 cup) all-purpose flour
1 ounce (¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons) unsweetened natural cocoa powder (not Dutch-processed)
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, melted and warm
1¼ cups packed light brown sugar
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ cup hot water
1 cup warm ganache (optional; see the recipe at right)

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Grease the bottom of an 8x2- or 9x2-inch round cake pan or line it with parchment.

In a small bowl, whisk the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, and salt. Sift only if the cocoa remains lumpy after whisking. In a large bowl, combine the melted butter and brown sugar with a wooden spoon or rubber spatula. Add the eggs and vanilla; stir until well blended. Add the flour mixture all at once and stir just until all the flour is moistened. Pour the hot water over the batter; stir just until it's incorporated and the batter is smooth. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan.

Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 30 minutes for a 9-inch pan; 35 to 40 minutes for an 8-inch pan. Let cool in the pan on a rack for 10 minutes. Run a thin knife around the edge and invert the cake (peel off the parchment if necessary). Invert it again onto the rack and let cool completely.

Once cool, set the rack over a baking sheet or foil. Pour the warm ganache over the cake and use an icing spatula to spread it over the top of the cake and down the sides. Let set for about an hour before serving.

Ganache

Yields 1½ cups.

You'll have a bit of this ganache left over after icing the cake; use it as a sauce for ice cream or another dessert. It keeps for a week in the refrigerator. Rewarm gently.

8 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
1 cup heavy cream; more as needed
Granulated sugar (optional)

Put the chocolate in a medium heatproof bowl. In a small saucepan, bring the cream to a boil. Pour the hot cream over the chocolate and whisk gently until the chocolate is completely melted and smooth. (If using a 70% bittersweet chocolate, the ganache might be a bit thick; add more cream, a tablespoon at a time, to thin it. You might also want to add a couple of teaspoons of sugar when you add the hot cream.)



Bittersweet Chocolate Rum Sauce

Yields about 1 cup.

This simple yet divine chocolate sauce may be made with bittersweet or semisweet chocolate. Taste the sauce on ice cream before adding more sugar; chocolate sauce that tastes too strong on its own is usually perfect with ice cream.

10 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
3 tablespoons dark rum
½ to 1¼ cups half-and-half
Granulated sugar to taste (optional)

Combine the chocolate and rum in a heatproof bowl. If using a standard bittersweet or semisweet chocolate (without a percentage on the label), add ½ cup of the half-and-half; if using a chocolate labeled 66% to 70% chocolate liquor, add 1 cup of the half-and-half.

Set the bowl over a pan of barely simmering water (or set the bowl directly in a wide skillet of barely simmering water); stir frequently until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Note: A high-percentage chocolate may cause the sauce to look curdled. If this happens, whisk in a little more half-and-half or some sugar or both.

To adjust the consistency and sweetness, spoon a little sauce over some ice cream and wait a minute for the sauce to cool before tasting. If the sauce tastes too bitter, stir in some sugar, a little at a time. If the sauce thickens with cooling more than you like, stir in more half-and-half by the tablespoon as needed.

Serve the sauce warm over ice cream, or let it cool, cover it, and store it for up to a week in the refrigerator. Reheat the sauce by setting the bowl in a skillet of barely simmering water.

Chocolate Soufflé Cookies

Yields about forty 2-inch cookies.

Chocolatey and moist with a light, crisp exterior, this recipe is an excellent showcase for high-quality chocolate.

6 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped
2 large egg whites, at room temperature
¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¼ cup granulated sugar
¾ cup finely chopped walnuts

Position oven racks in the upper and lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease two baking sheets or line them with parchment.

Melt the chocolate (see Melting on the opposite side) and set aside. Using a hand or stand mixer, beat the egg whites with the cream of tartar until soft



peaks form. With the beaters running, gradually add the vanilla and sugar until the egg whites hold stiff peaks but don't look dry. Pour the nuts and melted chocolate over the whipped whites. Gently fold the mixture with a large rubber spatula, trying not to deflate the egg whites, until the color is just uniform. Immediately drop level measuring teaspoons of the batter onto the baking sheets, leaving at least 1 inch

between the cookies. Bake until the cookies are shiny and cracked, 10 to 12 minutes; they should be firm on the outside but still gooey inside when you press them. Slide the parchment liners onto racks or use a metal spatula to transfer the cookies to racks and let cool completely. The cookies are best eaten on the day they're baked but will last two to three days if stored in an airtight container.

Bittersweet Hot Chocolate

Yields 2 cups; serves four to six.

I find most hot chocolate drinks much too sweet for my taste. I never add sugar when I make this. Instead, I pass a sugar bowl so that guests can add their own. This hot chocolate is too rich to be served in mugs; instead, serve it in small cups or demitasses. Choose your favorite nibbling bittersweet or semisweet chocolate for this recipe, as it's one that will highlight and not obscure the chocolate's distinct flavor nuances.

5 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped (I love a 70% bittersweet, but milder chocolates also work well)
Pinch salt
1 cup boiling water
1 cup whole milk
Lightly sweetened whipped cream

In a medium saucepan, combine the chocolate, salt, and about ⅓ cup of the boiling water. Stir until the choco-



late is completely melted and smooth. Add the rest of the water and heat, whisking constantly, until the mixture begins to simmer at the edges. Whisk in the milk and continue to cook until steaming hot, but keep the temperature well under a boil (ideally no more than 180°F) for the best taste and texture. Just before serving, whisk to a froth. Serve in small cups. Pass a sugar bowl and a small bowl of whipped cream for each person to serve himself.

Holiday Appetizers

BY TONY ROSENFELD



These hors d'oeuvres are quick to prepare yet dressy enough for holiday entertaining. Make one or more of the bread "bases" and then choose your toppings. Figure about three to four crostini or toasts or about five pita chips per guest. You can make the bread bases a day ahead; store them in an airtight container. Many of the toppings can be made ahead too, but don't assemble until about half an hour before serving so the bread doesn't get soggy.

The three crisp bases



Crostini

Yields 16 crostini.

16 baguette slices, between 1/4 and 1/2 inch thick (from about 1/2 baguette)
2 cloves garlic, cut in half
2 to 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt

Adjust an oven rack to 6 inches from the broiler and turn the broiler on to high. Rub one side of each bread slice with the garlic and set on a baking sheet lined with aluminum foil. Brush the garlic side with the oil and season with salt. Broil until the bread is browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Flip and broil the other side 1 minute more. Spread with your choice of the crostini toppings at right.



Toast Points

Yields 16 toast points.

4 slices (about 4 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches) country white bread (such as Pepperidge Farm)
1 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Adjust an oven rack to 6 inches from the broiler and turn the broiler on to high. Set the bread on a baking sheet, brush one side with the melted butter, and season with salt and pepper. Toast the bread until it's golden brown and crisp on top, about 1 to 2 minutes. Flip and cook the other side until golden, about 1 minute. While the bread is still hot, slice off the edges. Let cool slightly. Spread with your choice of toppings (see other side) before cutting into squares or triangles.



Pita Chips

Yields 32 chips.

2 pita breads (preferably plain and 8 inches wide)
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 450°F. Slice each pita into 8 even triangular pieces and then tear each piece apart at the seam to get a total of 32 pieces. Toss the pieces in a large bowl with the oil, 1/4 tsp. salt, and some pepper. Spread in a single layer on a large baking sheet. Bake, flipping after 5 minutes, until the chips are crisped and slightly browned, about 7 minutes total. Serve with the terrine or dip (see other side).

Crostini Toppings



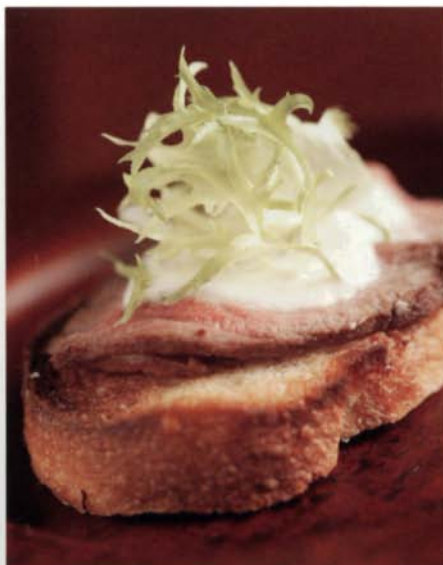
Crostini with Sautéed Mushrooms, Mint & Parmigiano

Yields 16 crostini.

- 2 scallions, trimmed
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 12 oz. mix of fresh shiitake and oyster mushrooms, stemmed and thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice; more to taste
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh mint
- 1 recipe crostini (at far left)
- 16 thin curls of Parmigiano Reggiano (made with a vegetable peeler)

Slice the scallions thinly, separating the green and white parts as you go. Heat the oil in a large skillet over high heat for 30 seconds. Add the whites of the scallions and sauté for 30 seconds. Add the mushrooms, season with salt and pepper, and sauté, stirring occasionally, until they soften completely and brown in places, about 4 minutes. Stir in 1 tsp. lemon juice, the mint, and the scallion greens. Taste and add salt, pepper, and lemon juice as needed.

To assemble, spoon the mushrooms onto the crostini, top with a Parmigiano curl, and serve.



Crostini with Beef & Horseradish Cream

Yields 16 crostini.

- ½ lb. beef tenderloin (about a 1½-inch steak)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ cup crème fraîche (or sour cream)
- 2 to 3 tsp. prepared horseradish
- 1 recipe crostini (at far left)
- 16 pale, inner pieces of frisée (curly endive), washed and dried

Heat a small, heavy skillet over high heat for 1 minute. Season the beef with ¼ tsp. salt and some pepper. Turn the exhaust fan to high and sear the beef, flipping after 3 minutes, and then cook, flipping every couple of minutes until it's done to your liking, about 10 minutes total for medium rare. Transfer to a cutting board, let rest for 5 minutes, and then slice the beef thinly.

Mix the crème fraîche and horseradish in a small bowl; season with ¼ tsp. salt and a few grinds of pepper.

To assemble, top the crostini with a slice of beef, a dollop of the crème fraîche, and a small piece of frisée and serve.

Note: The beef can be cooked a few hours ahead and refrigerated. Bring it to room temperature and slice just before serving.



Crostini with White Bean Purée, Spinach & Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Yields about 1¼ cups spread; enough for at least 16 crostini.

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
- 3 cups packed baby spinach (about 5 oz.)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 15½-oz. can cannellini beans, rinsed well and drained
- 2 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
- 1 recipe crostini (at far left)
- 5 oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, thinly sliced

Heat the oil and garlic in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Once the garlic starts sizzling, reduce the heat to medium and cook until it turns golden, about 2 minutes. Transfer the garlic and all but 1 Tbs. of the oil to a food processor. Raise the heat to medium high, add the spinach, and sauté, stirring, until it wilts, about 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and set aside.

Put the cannellini beans, thyme, and 2 Tbs. water in the food processor with the garlic. Process until fairly smooth, adding another 1 or 2 Tbs. water if needed. Season with salt and pepper. If making ahead, refrigerate the white bean purée; bring it to room temperature before assembling.

To assemble, top the crostini with the bean purée, a portion of spinach, and slices of the sun-dried tomato and serve.

○ Toast Point Toppings



Smoked Salmon & Dill Mascarpone Toasts

Yields 16 canapes.

- 8 oz. mascarpone**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh dill, plus 16 small fronds for garnish**
- Finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ medium fennel bulb (about 8 oz.), cut in half through the core and cored**
- 1 recipe toast points (see other side)**
- 4 oz. sliced cold-smoked salmon, cut into 16 even pieces**

Mix the mascarpone, dill, 1 tsp. lemon zest, and 2 tsp. lemon juice in a medium bowl. Season with salt, pepper, and more lemon juice or zest to taste. Using a sharp vegetable peeler, peel the fennel into long, thin strips by pressing firmly against it; season the strips with salt. (You can do all of this ahead and refrigerate; bring to room temperature before assembling).

To assemble, spread the toasts with some of the mascarpone and then cut each toast into four even squares. Top each square with a couple of pieces of the fennel, a curl of the salmon, a dill frond, and a few grinds of black pepper.



Toast Points with Black Olive Tapenade & Red Pepper Curls

Yields about ¾ cup tapenade; enough for at least 16 toast points.

- ½ lemon**
- 1 cup pitted kalamata olives (about 5 oz.)**
- 1 tsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary**
- 1 small clove garlic, minced, sprinkled with ¼ tsp. kosher salt, and mashed to a paste**
- 1 to 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 recipe toast points (see other side)**
- ½ roasted red pepper (from a jar), thinly sliced**

Finely zest the lemon half. Put the zest, olives, rosemary, and garlic in a food processor. Add the olive oil through the feed tube, pulsing the machine until you get a thick, uniform paste. Transfer to a bowl and stir in a squeeze of lemon juice (about 1 tsp.). Season with salt, pepper, and more lemon juice to taste. (This can be made ahead and refrigerated; bring to room temperature before assembling).

To assemble, spread the tapenade on the toasts, slice each toast into four even triangles, top each with a slice of red pepper, and serve.



Spiced Shrimp & Avocado Toasts

Yields 16 canapes.

- 16 large shrimp (about ½ lb.), peeled, deveined, rinsed, and patted dry**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 tsp. chili powder; more to taste**
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 small ripe avocados (about 12 oz. total)**
- 1 Tbs. fresh lime juice; more for sprinkling**
- 3 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro, plus 16 whole leaves for garnish**
- 1 recipe toast points (see other side)**

Season the shrimp with ¼ tsp. salt, a few grinds of pepper, and 1 tsp. chili powder. Set a heavy 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat for 1 minute. Add the oil and shrimp and sauté, stirring occasionally, until the shrimp are opaque and firm to the touch, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board.

Pit the avocados and scoop the flesh into a small bowl. Add 1 Tbs. lime juice, the chopped cilantro, and a pinch of chili powder. Mash with a fork until relatively smooth and season with a heaping ½ tsp. salt and a few grinds of pepper. Slice the shrimp in half lengthwise.

To assemble, spread the mashed avocado over the toasts and slice each toast into four even rectangles. Top each with two halved pieces of shrimp and a cilantro leaf, sprinkle with lime juice and salt, and serve. (The rectangles can be cut into squares for even smaller bites.)

Pita Chip Dips



Goat Cheese, Pesto & Sun-Dried Tomato Terrine

Yields about 1½ cups.

10 oz. goat cheese
¼ to ½ cup heavy cream
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 Tbs. basil pesto (homemade or store-bought)
5 oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and finely chopped
¼ cup pine nuts, toasted and coarsely chopped
Extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling
1 recipe pita chips (see other side)

Line the inside of a 2-cup sharply sloping bowl (about 4 inches across the top) with plastic; let the ends extend over the sides a few inches. In a mixing bowl, mash the goat cheese and ¼ cup of the cream with a fork and season with ¼ tsp. salt and a few grinds of pepper; add more cream if the cheese hasn't softened. Spoon about one-third of the cheese into the lined bowl and pack it into an even layer. Spread the pesto almost completely to the sides of the first layer of cheese. Top with another third of the cheese, the sun-dried tomatoes, and all but ½ Tbs. of the pine nuts. Top with the remaining cheese. Pack down, fold the plastic over, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Half an hour before serving, take the bowl out of the refrigerator. Pull on the edges of the plastic to loosen the terrine from the bowl. Invert the terrine onto a plate, drizzle with a little olive oil, and let sit for ½ hour to warm up. Sprinkle with the remaining pine nuts, season liberally with pepper, and serve with the pita chips.



Golden Onion & Thyme Dip

Yields about 2¼ cups dip.

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 large Spanish or 2 large yellow onions (about 1 lb. total), finely diced
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
8 oz. cream cheese
6 Tbs. sour cream
1 scant Tbs. fresh thyme leaves, chopped
Pinch cayenne
1 recipe pita chips (see other side)

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onion, season with ½ tsp. salt, and sauté, stirring often, until the onion softens completely and starts to brown, about 9 minutes. Transfer to a food processor and add the cream cheese, sour cream, thyme, and cayenne. Pulse until the mixture is well combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve with the pita chips.